



**Government
of South Australia**

Treasurer

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TRS22D0313

Hon Bob Baldwin
Chair
Australian Fishing Trade Association
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Dear Mr Baldwin

I refer to your correspondence seeking the Government's recreational fishing policy ahead of the 2022 State Election.

Please find attached a consolidated response on behalf of the government to your correspondence.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Rob Lucas'.

Hon Rob Lucas MLC
Treasurer

17 February 2022

2022 South Australian election

Response Australian Fishing Trade Association

Thank you for providing the opportunity to inform Australian Fishing Trade Association (AFTA) members of the priorities of the Marshall Liberal Government in recreational fishing ahead of the 2022 State Election.

The Government has been delivering on the priorities of the state's 277,000 recreational fishers by opening reservoirs and new fishing opportunities, upgrading jetties and boat ramps, improving the long term sustainability of fish stocks, modernising the recreational charter boat fishing sector and bringing recreational fishers together.

The recreational fishing sector is incredibly important to South Australia, providing significant economic, social and wellbeing benefits to the state and its regions. Across government portfolios, we are encouraging South Australians to get out and explore our natural environment, visit parks and nature-based tourism opportunities, enjoy boating, campaign and fishing experiences.

South Australia is geographically blessed with prime fishing grounds in our gulfs, open coastal waters and the River Murray. South Australia should have the nation's most vibrant recreational fishing sector but over 16 years of Labor administration, opportunities for the sector fell behind other states.

When we were elected, the Government inherited:

- a recreational fishing sector that was divided and disjointed;
- a recreational fishing sector which had been cut off from other fishing stakeholders and scientists with Labor's abolition of the Fisheries Council;
- loss of recreational fishing grounds due to Labor's controversial marine parks;
- mismanagement of fish stocks under Labor resulting in depletion of garfish, snapper and northern zone rock lobster as well as forced closures imposed on fishing for King George whiting and Gulf St Vincent prawns;
- a charter boat fishing sector in chronic decline with falling patronage; and
- a huge backlog in boating and jetties infrastructure after years of under-investment.

Despite challenges to the State's economy caused by extreme bushfires, drought, COVID-19 and global market disruption, the Government has tackled these challenges head-on. The Government has committed \$20 million for the upgrade of boat ramps and jetties across the state, from the South East to the West Coast. The Government has opened our reservoirs to the community and to recreational fishing, as we recognise what an important community asset these facilities are. The Government also invested \$1.2 million to construct a new shellfish reef off Glenelg to grow fish stocks, boost tourism and improve water quality.

We have partnered with the Commonwealth Government to fund a further \$1.7 million in relatively small but important boating, camping and fishing facility upgrades across regional South Australia, announced last December.

To encourage further growth in recreational fishing, the Government called for and funded the development of a *Recreational Fishing Strategy for South Australia*. Development of the Strategy was led by the Minister's Recreational Fishing Advisory Council (MRFAC) following extensive consultation with recreational fishers. This sector-led Strategy aims to deliver tangible outcomes to the recreational fishing community by building capacity and capability, supporting growth in the sector, enhancing knowledge and information and build strategic partnerships to expand opportunities.

The Government has delivered on our election commitment to establish the Minister's Recreational Fishing Advisory Council as the peak body providing advice to government on recreational fishing matters. Establishment of the MRFAC has worked to bring the various recreational fishing interests and perspectives around the one table in a unified way to provide advice to government on priorities and matters of importance. In a first, the MRFAC comprises fishers who are directly elected by the wider South Australian recreational fishing public.

The Government has also established a South Australian Seafood Council, bringing together representatives of all key fishing sectors, scientists and stakeholders, including recreational fishers, charter boat operators, commercial fishers and aquaculture businesses. The Seafood Council is another important step in encouraging fishing sectors to work on shared interests and build capacity and knowledge on fisheries management.

The Government is committed to working with the recreational fishing community to expand opportunities for recreational fishing in South Australia. Unlike most other states, South Australia's recreational fishers are not required to pay the government for a licence to go fishing, or to take their son, daughter or grandchildren fishing. Our fishers have long been divided on the issue of fishing licences and support for a licence is still far from universal. In other jurisdictions, a wide range of recreational fishing development activities are funded by fishers from the proceeds of regulated recreational fishing licences. The Government's position is we will not be imposing a recreational fishing licence on the sector. The Government supports the efforts of the MRFAC to examine other opportunities to sustainably raise funds for recreational fishing developmental and promotion activities. The value our recreational fishers place on their activities, and significant private investment fishers make, suggests the sector has the capability to invest in fishing development activities, if encouraged and supported by government to do so.

Supporting the Recreational Fishing Strategy and the Seafood Growth Strategy for South Australia 2021-2031, the Government is providing \$100,000 over two years for regional recreational fishing activity grants to encourage people to get involved in fishing, as well as support for golden fish events and working with the MRFAC to promote citizen science initiatives.

The Government is also taking practical steps to improve fair access to fishing opportunities for recreational fishers. The primary step being taken is to increase the sustainability of key fish stocks by adopting modern fisheries management underpinned by expert fisheries science – and investing in data collection about the actual catch of recreational fishers.

The Government is changing outdated commercial fishing practices which saw depleting snapper and garfish populations under Labor, and annual fishing closures forced on King George whiting. We have invested \$24.5 million in a major reform of the commercial marine scalefish fishery, buying out 100 commercial net and line fishing licences and introducing quota management for snapper, whiting, garfish and calamari. These reforms will mean total commercial catches of these species in the primary fishing grounds, in our gulfs, will be capped every year at scientifically determined sustainable levels.

Snapper is a highly prized fish for recreational fishers. To allow our decimated snapper populations to recover, the Government took strong but necessary action to close snapper fishing for three seasons in our gulfs and we are working towards re-opening the fishery as scheduled in February 2023.

The Government has invested \$500,000 in a snapper re-stocking program to promote quicker recovery of the species. We have also invested in additional science into how the snapper biomass is recovering. The outcomes of this research will be available in the latter half of 2022 and will inform decisions to reopen the fishery and what recreational bag and boat limits might be when the snapper fishery reopens.

In the meantime, the Government continues to support sustainable recreational snapper and charter boat fishing in the South East, encouraging fishers to report their snapper catches on the SA Recreational Fishing app.

Recognising the important role that the charter boat sector plays in supporting fishing tourism and allowing families without access to a boat to gain an experience of coastal fishing, the Government has delivered grants to support charter boat operators diversify their businesses, add to the amenities and offerings for clients while onboard, and better link with the tourism sector as a way of driving business to the industry.

The Government has delivered on a 2018 election commitment to review the marine parks established by the former Labor administration. The Government has engaged in lengthy consultations with recreational and commercial fishers, as well as conservation stakeholders, to achieve common ground in reopening some areas to fishing while agreeing some heavily contested former fishing grounds would remain under marine parks. The nature of the commitments obtained from stakeholders is that there would not be additional marine parks sought as part of the statutory review which is to be undertaken later in 2022. This provides all fishing stakeholders certainty for the future.

The Government looks forward to working with the AFTA and your members to promote further opportunities for recreational fishing in South Australia's marine and inland waters.