

Hello My name is Peter Docking and I commenced land based fresh ground water aquaculture in 1990 at my farm near Penola in S.A.

a) The nature of land based fresh water aquaculture here in SA is in serious decline with most leaving due to the exorbitant licence fees for both water and fish farming licence being charged. Most have been small but efficient family units but with the privatising of the electricity grid costs have gone up by a factor of up to 5 times. This plus the licencing cost rises has forced most out of the industry. New industries must be encouraged, not plundered as a new cash cow by the above entities.

In short the status of this section in SA is in position of becoming non-existent. To my knowledge none of these original start up businesses have ever received any assistance from any government. My own business is now in shut down awaiting the outcome described below.

b) Currently I see zero opportunity for this industry as the lack of any support outlined above is the biggest deterrent.

Expansion is only ever to become viable if people are encouraged to develop free of crippling costs. There is eagerness out there for the industry but no desire to commence for fear of being exploited. I have been getting calls from my buyers pleading for product but the cost of reinstating the facility is not covered by the returns offered. Such a pity that these prices were not around some years back so that they would encourage more production.

Attracting investors for small to medium businesses is near impossible the same as it has been for the last 30 years due to 1, scammers using this new industry to con money from the public and then absconding with it. 2, Banks unwilling to lend due to the reputation described above and a lack of good history by small producers in a new industry.

c) 1, Most of these producers have been working in a very streamlined way to survive and grow their business and became very efficient at extracting a small profit from very difficult circumstances. Production increases are self-defeating as this lowers returns as was seen post Victorian fires some 15 years ago when the price of freshwater trout went up 20-30% for a period of 2 years giving some a good income. However those producers who lost stock for that period then made the foolish mistake of looking at the inflated price and in some cases doubling production resulting in a price drop of some 30% which made most unviable. The other problem encountered at this time was the rapid increase of power and licencing fees combined with removal of pumping rights.

In my case my ground water pumping allowance was reduced by 97% and the licence cost increased from \$25 per annum to above \$650 per annum. This was in spite of me showing and proving that I was returning 4 times more water to the aquifer than I was using through evaporation. IE all water pumped and collected from rainfall was kept within the farm boundary.

2, As for creating new industry I see this as being almost impossible due to the total lack of interest in federal departments to do the work needed to allow new species to be imported for aquaculture.

Once again I use my own example.

In 2013 with the encouragement of PIRSA aquaculture I returned to my original request to be able to import sturgeon for aquaculture. I resubmitted my request and six months of questions followed by detailed answers by myself and from offshore, which amounted to dozens of emails back and forth to get the answers supplied. ( I still have these emails) Following this communication with the then department of environment a request to the then agriculture minister Mr Greg Hunt the act was changed to allow for the importation of two species, beluga and siberian sturgeon. I do not have any grievance with this department. However it was then handed to the federal agriculture department for them to perform a BIRA (biological import risk assessment). Result nothing has happened until this year.

I was informed verbally by one officer back in 2016 that in their eyes it was a silly little SA government project not worth them worrying about. ( I can name this person) who then informed me that I needed to lodge as a person of interest in this application. This I duly did. At the same time I informed them that ALL of the required information was in the files at the environment department.

This lack of action was followed up via my getting assistance from my local MP who through various federal agriculture ministers beginning with Mr Barnaby Joyce through to the current Mr David Littleproud, have put pressure on the now DEWNR (being the two departments now combined) to finalise this urgent work. This has taken another six months of time with very little done. In the last 2 months there has been one telly conference with another due on 12-3-2021. Some reluctant progress has been made by this department.

Over the years there have been various weak excuses for not finishing this work and now there seems to be a reluctant agreement to actually do some work and finish the assessment within another 2.5 years. ( Little wonder people like myself don't put ourselves out to create new projects).

d) I see a very big future for the industry to expand into new projects providing we get support and COOPERATION from various government departments.

Again in my case I have offshore investors ready and waiting to invest up to \$30million in my inland freshwater sturgeon project They will bring with them the expertise to build and run this facility plus will employ up to 30 locals. The whole project will be solar powered to help the environment and keep running costs down. I have buyers here in Australia wanting product plus a big export demand that these investors will bring with them.

In conclusion all we need is swift cooperation from all government departments plus an easy path to start up free of exhorbitant fees to begin with.

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