



Hardship support for wild catch fishers and aquaculturalists

January 2026

Australia's wild catch fishers and aquaculturalists face many risks to their business, including natural disasters, drying conditions, pests and diseases, and other market disruptions. Australian Government programs and services can assist our fishing sector as they plan for, manage, and recover from these shocks.

Support in your area

There are many other people and organisations you can talk to about your options. They include:

- Your state and local government
- Fishing industry groups
- Banks and other trusted advisers, such as fisheries extension officers and accountants
- Seafood Industry Australia's Stay Afloat program which provides mental health support for the seafood industry. Services are currently provided for South Australia and Queensland. Your state coordinator can connect you with a trusted advocate in your region. Contact SA@stayafloat.com.au

Algal Bloom Summer Plan

The South Australian and Australian Governments are supporting wild catch fishers and aquaculturalists experiencing the impacts of the algal bloom in South Australia.

This includes the \$102.5 million Algal Bloom Summer Plan which is co-funded by both governments, the \$28 million support package delivered by both governments in July 2025, and the \$6.5 million package committed by the Australian Government in August 2025.

The Summer Plan features \$21.5 million in support for South Australia's fishing and marine sector. It features support grants to fisheries and aquaculture licence holders, an industry response and resilience program, as well as licence fee relief.

For more information about the Summer Plan, visit algalbloom.sa.gov.au/summer-plan

Australian Government support

The Australian Government has a range of support programs that are always available for those in hardship, including Australia's wild catch fishers and aquaculturalists.

Rural Financial Counselling Service (RFCS)

The Rural Financial Counselling Service (RFCS) program provides free, confidential financial counselling to farmers, fishers, foresters, and small related enterprises experiencing, or at risk of, financial hardship—regardless of the cause.

Businesses involved in wild catch fishing and aquaculture are eligible for RFCS support, provided they are commercial enterprises with 19 or fewer employees.

Rural financial counsellors can assist fishers to:

- Understand their financial position through developing budgets and cash flows
- Develop an action plan and take steps necessary to get out of financial difficulty
- Negotiate with lenders
- Build financial knowledge, skills and resilience to manage potential challenges in the future
- Identify and apply for other government programs and assistance that supports the way back to self-sufficiency.

To find your nearest RFC, visit agriculture.gov.au/rfcs or call 1300 771 741.



Regional Investment Corporation (RIC) loans

The Regional Investment Corporation (RIC) delivers concessional loans on behalf of the Australian Government to support farm businesses, and drought-affected, farm-related small businesses. These loans aim to improve long-term resilience and profitability.

Eligibility for current loans

RIC farm business loans are for Australian farm businesses involved in the agricultural, horticultural, pastoral, apicultural (beekeeping) or aquacultural industries, and that derive their income directly from production. The RIC defines its eligible industries with the help of ANZIC Codes (Australia and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification 2006), being those involved in activities that fall under ANZIC Codes for Agriculture and Aquaculture, with some exceptions.

Aquaculture farm businesses are eligible for RIC loans, including:

- Offshore longline and rack aquaculture (including offshore mollusc farming e.g. oysters and mussels)
- Offshore cage aquaculture
- Onshore aquaculture.

Wild catch fishing businesses are not eligible for RIC loans as their operations are considered as harvesting.

RIC loans are for long term viable farm businesses in financial need that have experienced a significant financial impact due to an event outside their control, such as:

- Drought
- Natural disasters
- Pest or disease outbreaks
- Unexpected market closures.

Eligibility including the duration of the financial impact, existing commercial debt, capacity to repay and providing sufficient and satisfactory security for the loan, is assessed for each applicant.

New Marine Harmful Algal Bloom and Marine Heatwave Loan

The Australian Government has introduced the Marine Harmful Algal Bloom and Marine Heatwave Loan through the RIC.

The Marine Harmful Algal Bloom and Marine Heatwave Loan will support wild catch fishing and aquaculture businesses facing financial pressure due to marine slow-onset significant ecological events.

It will be available to those wild catch fishing and aquaculture businesses affected by the algal bloom in South Australia.

Loans will include:

- Amounts up to \$250,000 over 10 years
- Interest-only repayments for the first 5 years
- Interest rates consistent with other RIC products
- Eligible uses will include refinancing existing debt, operating expenses and capital expenditure

Loans are expected to be available in the first half of 2026 and are designed to help businesses withstand the financial impacts of the algal bloom in South Australia and assist with recovery once conditions improve.

For more information on RIC loans, including eligibility and to register your interest in the new Marine Harmful Algal Bloom and Marine Heatwave Loan, visit ric.gov.au or call 1800 875 675.



Farm Household Allowance (FHA)

Farm Household Allowance (FHA) is an income support program assisting farmers and their partners experiencing low cash flow.

The definition of a farmer includes those engaged in aquaculture. However, wild catch fishers are not considered farmers for FHA purposes, as their activities are classified as harvesting rather than farming.

For information on Australian Government income support that may fit their circumstances, wild catch fishers should contact servicesaustralia.gov.au.

There are 5 financial components of the Farm Household Allowance:

1. Up to 4 years of fortnightly income support (in every 10-year period).
2. Ancillary allowances such as Pharmaceutical Allowance, Telephone Allowance, Rent Assistance and Remote Area Allowance and a Health Care Card.
3. A professional financial assessment of the farm business (worth up to \$1,500).
4. Funding to help develop skills, access training and pay for professional advice (up to \$10,000 per person).
5. Individual support from a dedicated case manager.

As a social security payment, the FHA program is uncapped and demand-driven—meaning that everyone who is eligible will receive support. Farmers, including those in aquaculture, are encouraged not to self-assess or delay applying out of concern that others may be in greater need. If you are eligible and need support – apply early, apply now.

For more information, visit agriculture.gov.au/fha.

Farm Management Deposit Scheme (FMDs)

The Farm Management Deposit Scheme (FMDs) supports primary producers – including wild catch fishers and aquaculturalists – in managing fluctuations in income.

FMDs are designed to strengthen financial resilience by allowing producers to build cash reserves during profitable years, which can then be accessed during periods of low income.

Eligible primary producers can deposit pre-tax income into an FMD account, which is tax-deductible in the year of deposit. Withdrawals are treated as taxable income in the year they are made.

Wild catch fishers and aquaculturalists can use previously lodged FMDs to help maintain business cash flow during challenging financial periods.

For more information, visit agriculture.gov.au/fmd.

Other Taxation Measures

A range of other concessional taxation measures are available to help wild catch fishers and aquaculturalists.

Income Tax averaging

Wild -catch fishers and aquaculturalists can access income tax averaging to help smooth out fluctuations in income and tax liabilities over a period of up to five years. This ensures they are not disadvantaged compared to taxpayers with more consistent earnings.

Instant asset write-off

Eligible small businesses with an aggregated turnover of less than \$10 million can immediately deduct the full cost of eligible depreciating assets valued under \$20,000. This applies to assets first used or installed ready for use between 1 July 2024 and 30 June 2025.

The Australian Government has committed to extending the \$20,000 threshold for the 2025–26 financial year.

Insurance payments for livestock loss

If a primary producer receives an insurance payout for the loss of livestock—and has previously claimed the insurance premiums as a tax deduction—the payment is treated as assessable income. Producers may elect to spread the income over five years to help manage tax impacts.

The ATO generally considers all animals used in a primary production business, including farmed fish and molluscs, to be classified as livestock.

For more information, visit the Australian Taxation Office website [Help for Primary producers](#).

More information

For more information on hardship support, visit the Drought, disaster and rural support webpage, drought.gov.au.

