

Commercial fishing industry reeling from mental health crisis

August 11 2015, by Katie Thompson



A school of sardines in Italy. Credit: Wikimedia / Alessandro Duci

Chronic job insecurity has led to a mental health crisis and high rates of suicide among Australian commercial fishers, according to a new Deakin University study published this month in *Marine Policy* journal.

Led by Deakin University maritime anthropologist, Dr Tanya King, the

report 'A Different Kettle of Fish: Mental health strategies for Australian fishers and farmers' reveals a community under stress and struggling under the weight of government policy around fishing licences.

While the [mental health](#) issues of the farming industry – which are often linked with fishers when it comes to research data and government policy – are well documented and prevention programs well-funded, less is known about the fishing industry.

Dr King explains that part of the problem lies in how health and safety policies are applied across the board in the farming, fishing and agricultural industries without consideration of the particular issues that affect the fishing community.

"Why are the same health and safety policies applied to farmers, fishers and other agricultural workers despite there being particular features of small-scale fishing businesses that make them particularly vulnerable to depression, anxiety and suicide?" she asked.

"Insecurity of fishing concessions (quotas and licences), financial issues arising from banks tightening money to the industry, challenges accessing health care, physical risk, and politically-driven changes to [government policy](#) were all identified as major issues affecting fishers' health and well-being in small-scale fishing businesses.

"Of particular concern for fishers is the insecurity around fishing concessions. This ultimately renders fisher livelihoods insecure and we know that insecure livelihoods are a big contributor to poor mental health."

Dr King explains that the research demonstrates a real need for the separation of health research in the fishing and farming industries.

"This would allow the specific issues facing the [fishing industry](#) to be addressed, rather than assuming that policies good for farmers will necessarily work for [fishers](#).

"It's not just people's livelihoods, or even consumer access to fresh, sustainable local seafood – people's lives are on the line," she said.

Provided by Deakin University

Citation: Commercial fishing industry reeling from mental health crisis (2015, August 11) retrieved 13 March 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-08-commercial-fishing-industry-reeling-mental.html>

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