

Food Authority

Summary of meeting outcomes

NSW Seafood Industry Forum

27 September 2022

The NSW Seafood Industry Forum met via video conference on 27 September 2022. Issues considered by the Forum are outlined below.

Attendees

NSW Seafood Industry Forum members: Danielle Adams (Clarence River Co-operative), Tricia Beatty (Professional Fisher's Association Inc), Mark Boulter (Seafood Importers' Association of Australasia Inc), Lisa Keating (De Costi Seafoods (Holdings) Pty Ltd), Michael Kitchener (The Master Fish Merchants' Association of Australia), Erik Poole (Sydney Fish Market Pty Ltd), Russell Sydenham (NSW Aquaculture Association Inc).

NSW DPI – Biosecurity & Food Safety: Eric Davis (Manager, Food Policy & Partnerships), Jaime Garcia (Secretariat), Hollie Mackie (Education Officer Compliance Education & Behaviour Change), Mark Mackie (Manager, Regulatory Operations Unit Compliance and Integrity Systems) Mathew Richardson (Manager Regulation & Operational Advice), Lisa Szabo - Chair (Director Food Safety & CEO NSW Food Authority), Melissa Walker (Team Leader Aquatic Biosecurity Policy & Programs).

Apologies: Christina Boss (Acting Manager Aquatic Biosecurity Programs), Geneveive Bonello, (Manager Communications Strategic Programs & Partnerships), David Cusack, (Manager Food Standards & Programs), Ross Fidden (Commercial Fishermen's Co-operative Ltd), Jeffrey Go (Senior Veterinary Officer Aquatic Biosecurity), Patrick Phillips (Regulatory Operations Manager), Helen Schaefer (Team Leader, Animal Welfare Policy & Programs), Kerry Strangas (The Master Fish Merchants Association), Greg Vakaci (Director, Compliance & Integrity Systems).

Industry updates

Members provided updates on the following key and emerging issues in their respective industry sectors:

- Land based agriculture businesses are reporting good outcomes due to good water flows which have also benefited aquatic environments and fish growth (oyster harvest areas have been adversely affected though).
- Fisheries Research Development Corporation (FRDC) led a research project that was conducted by a Western Australia University to develop technology that is able to identify kingfish and mahi-mahi infected with *Kudoa* sp. parasites which can produce soft/milky flesh. That project was unsuccessful, but FRDC has agreed to continue work to detect fish infected with these parasites.
- Industry is awaiting a report by the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee of its inquiry into cultural fishing and fisheries quotas system https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Rural_and_Regional_Affairs_and_Transport/Fisheriesquota47

and a report from the NSW parliamentary inquiry into Commencement of the *Fisheries Management Amendment Act 2009* (Schedule 1.)

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/inquiries/Pages/inquiry-details.aspx?pk=2850#tab-timeline>.

- The Professional Fishermen's Association (PFA) in partnership eel fishers in NSW is working on a value adding project to get eels into different market segments within the domestic market.
- PFA is about to start pilot trials of estuarine pot mud grab anti-theft devices.
- PFA now has an online fisheries leadership and sector representation training which is open to all those within the seafood industry. The training is a self-paced free training resource that was written by the Australian Maritime Fisheries Academy with input from all state industry bodies.
- DPI has funded PFA to engage with action business coaches, to run fisheries business training up and down the coast to improve business knowledge, business strategies and capacity to deal with natural disasters within a business framework.
- FRDC has started an Oysters Australia funded project to develop national shellfish safety training materials for the industry. The project is in its infancy with Mark Boulter and DPI representatives involved.
- Sydney Fish Markets reported that the seafood festival held on 25th September was a success with over 25,000 visitors.
- Staffing remains an issue of concern for the seafood retail sector

Food Safety Compliance Report

Mark Mackie updated the Forum on the seafood industry compliance activities for the 2021-22 financial year to date. Licensed seafood sector compliance remained high at 95% despite an increase in audits and inspections across the sector. A total of 445 audits & inspections were conducted during this period, with a combined 29 Improvement notices, penalty notices, prohibition orders, or warning letters issued during this period.

Food safety resources for fishers

Hollie Mackie from DPI's Compliance team provided an update on the food safety resources developed to help fishers understand their food safety obligations. It was agreed that some minor changes are still needed, and members will be given further opportunity to provide comments and feedback to ensure they are correct and fit for purpose prior to final distribution.

White spot disease update

Amanda Walker presented a paper and informed members of the recent detection of White Spot Syndrome Virus (WSSV) in Black Tiger Prawn (*Penaeus monodon*) broodstock in an enclosed biosecure facility in northern NSW.

White Spot Disease of Crustaceans (White Spot) is a contagious viral disease of crustaceans, caused by (WSSV) that was detected in Australia in prawn farms in the Logan River in south-east Queensland in December 2016. This detection impacted all commercial prawn operations on the Logan River, and through active wild prawn and crustacean sampling, WSSV was detected in wild prawns in localised areas of north Moreton Bay during early 2017 and early 2018 and again in 2020. No WSSV was detected in sampling during 2019.

NSW Department of Primary Industries (NSW DPI) has had control measures in place since 2016 to mitigate the risk of spread of White Spot from south-east Queensland to NSW and has undertaken its own sampling of wild prawn populations since that time, with no evidence of White Spot found in NSW wild prawn populations.

Prior to the current detection, NSW surveillance was most recently undertaken in March 2022 in school prawns collected outside the Richmond River mouth.

On 18 August 2022 NSW DPI was advised of the suspect detection of White Spot Syndrome Virus (WSSV) in black tiger prawn (*Penaeus monodon*) broodstock at an enclosed facility in northern NSW. This notification was made through a commercial testing provider undertaking routine broodstock testing. NSW DPI's Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute retested on 20 August and CSIRO's Australian Centre for Disease Preparedness (ACDP) confirmed the positive result on 23 August 2022. Prior to this detection, White Spot has never been detected in any NSW crustacean populations, either wild or farmed.

Subsequent wild prawn surveillance by NSW DPI likewise has not detected White Spot in local estuary and offshore prawns. This includes laboratory analysis completed on 7 September on 612 prawn samples (Black Tiger Prawns and Eastern School Prawns) collected from the estuarine areas around the infected farm and nearby oceanic areas outside the Clarence River mouth.

These surveillance results are consistent with and reinforce results of NSW DPI proof of freedom testing for White Spot. This surveillance also reaffirms NSW as free from White Spot in its wild prawn populations.

NSW DPI has also responded swiftly and has worked closely with the affected business, the seafood industry and other state and federal jurisdictions to ensure rapid containment and management of the August 2022 detection.

NSW DPI has worked closely with owners of the enclosed prawn facility and has overseen the destruction and disposal of all infected prawns on site. Decontamination of the facility commenced immediately the diagnosis was confirmed on 23 August and was completed on 2 September 2022. A formal Biosecurity Direction was also implemented following the initial detection to ensure White Spot was contained to the premises prior to decontamination.

Despite the NSW response, Western Australia implemented border restrictions on movement of bait prawns from NSW into Western Australia on 6 September 2022, and South Australia implemented border restrictions on movement of NSW prawns and polychaete worms for use as bait on 7 September. NSW DPI is working with inter-jurisdictional counterparts to communicate surveillance results and reaffirm that NSW is White Spot free.

Investigation has not yet determined the pathway by which White Spot entered the NSW biosecure prawn facility or its origin. Preliminary genetic analysis using whole genome sequencing undertaken by ACDP indicates that the northern NSW White Spot is genetically distinct from that in south-east Queensland and is likely to be of a separate origin. NSW DPI will continue to keep stakeholders informed of any new information from these activities.

Although the detection of White Spot in the enclosed facility in NSW reinforces the need for constant vigilance for this biosecurity risk, this detection also demonstrates that biosecurity protocols developed for the prawn industry are effective in ensuring that White Spot was contained within the biosecure facility and not spread to grow-out ponds or the external environment where eradication would be much more challenging.

NSW DPI has been working closely with industry, the Commonwealth, and other jurisdictions. Investigations into the source of detection of White Spot at the prawn facility are ongoing.

White Spot poses no threat to human health or food safety and NSW seafood, including prawns, and remain safe to eat.

Biosecurity update

Melissa Walker provided further updates on QX detected in a Port Stephens estuary during February and March 2022. DPI has secured short term funding through Fisheries Research and Development Corporation to complete preliminary studies into the window of infection for QX. This included field work where worms from the sediment and copepods were collected amongst other things to determine QX lifecycle. Preliminary detection of QX using PCR positives in plankton samples that were dominated by copepods (small crustaceans) were found in two sites in Port Stephens.

These studies hope to help industry and will also be used by NSW DPI to inform policy and ensure NSW DPI QX management approaches match the way QX behaves in estuaries. The Port Stephens QX risk status is still listed in the control order as under investigation, but after consultation with industry to recommend that Port Stephens be classified as a high-risk area consistent with the procedure for ranking estuary risk. This is based on repeated detection over two seasons and the high prevalence detected within the estuary. So far the Government has supported fee waivers and further funding to expand and continue the QX disease resistance work.

The date for the next meeting of the NSW Seafood Industry Forum is to be informed.