

Summary of meeting outcomes

NSW Shellfish Committee

Date 6 November 2024

The NSW Shellfish Committee met via video conference 6 November 2024. Issues considered by the Committee are outlined below.

Attendees

NSW Shellfish Committee members:

Chair – Prof. Shauna Murray

Industry representative - Mr. Sam Gordon

Industry representative - Mr. Shane Buckley

NSW Farmers Oyster Project Manager – Mr. Andy Myers

NSW DPIRD – NSW Food Authority:

A/CEO NSW Food Authority – Mr. Lachlan Porteous

NSW Shellfish Program Manager - Mr. Anthony Zammit

Invited attendees:

NSW Shellfish Program Senior Shellfish Officer – Mr. Phil Baker (Secretary)

NSW DPIRD Program Leader Aquaculture – Mr. Ian Lyall

NSW DPIRD Senior Policy Officer Aquaculture – Dr. Emma Wilkie

NSW Oyster Extension Officer – Dr. Laura Stoltenberg

NSW Aquatic Biosecurity – Dr. Jeffrey Go

Deloitte Consultancy – Kaitlyn Fennell – Item 7c (ii)

Deloitte Consultancy – Eamon McGinn – Item 7c (ii)

Apologies:

Industry representative - Mrs. Pippa Boyton

Industry representative - Mr. Brandon Armstrong

Declaration conflict of interest:

No members declared a conflict of interest on the matters raised in the agenda.

1) Industry updates

Emergency oyster relay areas – Following a series of natural disasters in recent years, the need to identify and establish emergency oyster relay areas has risen. It is hoped that the establishment of emergency oyster relay areas outside of priority oyster aquaculture areas (POAA) will allow temporary movement of oysters from areas of unsuitable water quality to sections of an estuary with improved water quality to reduce oyster mortality events. Oysters moved outside classified harvest areas will be prohibited for sale and minimum withholding periods will apply once oysters return to a classified harvest area. Through the Storm & Flood Industry Recovery Project, NSW Farmers are working with industry initially in the Hawkesbury River and Wonboyn Lake estuaries as well as NSW DPIRD (Aquaculture Administration, NSW Food Authority & Aquatic Biosecurity) to identify suitable temporary emergency relay areas. DPIRD will consult with Crown Lands, TfNSW and local Council.

2) Matters raised relating to the Seafood Food Safety Scheme

Harvest area management report – Annual reviews for 26 shellfish harvest areas were conducted since the August 2024 meeting and NSW Shellfish Program remain on track for completion of all 80 harvest area annual reviews for the calendar year. 85 harvest area closures occurred since the previous meeting, with a total of 438 harvest area closures for the 2024 calendar year to date.

Shellfish wet storage requirements update – Revised requirements for wholesale shellfish wet storage have been finalised and can be found on the NSW Food Authority website [here](#). A new licensing portal is being created which all existing businesses licensed for wet storage will have to apply through ensure compliance with the revised wet storage requirements. The NSW Food Authority will inform licensed businesses once the licensing portal is live and accessible.

Shellfish vibrio management - The NSW Food Authority has issued updated [Vibrio risk management advice for NSW oysters](#) on 30 August 2024. The NSW Food Authority is also working with researchers to improve the understanding of how these pathogenic strains behave within SRO. Aquaculture Research Advisory Committee (ARAC) held a workshop on 10 October 2024 to bring industry representatives and key researchers together to develop a consolidated Vibrio research plan to prioritise projects and funding applications.

NSW Health are working to make *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* (Vp) a notifiable disease, this is likely to be implemented from the start of 2025. Once implemented the detection of two or more unrelated cases of Vp by a public health unit within a single incubation period will result in follow up interviews to determine whether a common source of infection is likely. Making Vp notifiable will improve the ability to detect illness outbreaks, identify commonalities and links to possible food sources and assess the effectiveness of current Vibrio risk management practices.

DAFF export de-listings – The federal Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) has recently updated the export certification database which records all shellfish exports. Part of this update included only the past four (4) years of data, meaning that shellfish harvest areas that had not recorded an export shipment for the prior four year period was not transferred and effectively de-listed for export.

DAFF advise that the de-listed harvest areas would only be re-listed in the updated database if industry could demonstrate a genuine intention to export from those areas. Recognising the time and expense incurred by industry in obtaining export approval, the NSW Shellfish Committee resolved to write to the department requesting the areas be relisted. Individual businesses with questions or comments are also urged to contact DAFF at;

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Attn: Shelly Alderman – Assistant Director
Dairy, Eggs & Fish Export Program
Export and Veterinary Services Division
GPO Box 858
Canberra, ACT, 2601

Expression of interest for NSW Shellfish Committee – The existing membership of the NSW Shellfish Committee is set to expire 14 April 2025 and a new committee will be established following this expiry date. A call for expressions of interest for NSW Shellfish Committee members will be forth coming prior to the next and final meeting of the incumbent committee which is scheduled for 26 February 2025. Pending the number of applications a

selection process may occur to establish the new committee. The first meeting date of the newly established committee will be 14 May 2025.

All licensed shellfish businesses will be notified when the call for expressions of interest to apply for the NSW Shellfish Committee is active.

3) Non-food safety matters relating to shellfish

Sydney Cockle restoration and aquaculture – Following the 2022 floods, it has been observed that Sydney Cockles are largely absent from many estuaries north of Wallis Lake where they were historically present. Given the strong likelihood of recruitment limitation in flood-affected estuaries, seeding hatchery-reared cockles may be a feasible means to restore the species and is an opportunity for aquaculture trials.

Seeding of cockles in conjunction with oyster aquaculture is an opportunity for oyster growers to diversify their crops by using sediments under their leases to grow Sydney Cockle for market.

Following the seeding, measurements of the ecological benefits (i.e., filtration and bioturbation), of Sydney Cockle will be quantified (NSW Estuary Asset Protection Program 'NEAP' Action 6 - Monitoring and research). Importantly, Sydney Cockle is of cultural importance and field monitoring in the Tweed River will be supported by the NEAP Aboriginal Cultural Restoration partners. NSW DPIRD and Wallis Lake oyster farmers intend to collect broodstock, hatch and rear stock and seed the Tweed and Wallis Lake estuaries for experimental trials, including in the seafloor under oyster leases. A genetic stock structure study is ongoing.

Real time water quality sensors funding – The NSW Oyster Transformation research project was funded by NSW DPIRD, UTS, NSW Farmers, NSW Sector Development Grants and Food Agility CRC officially finished in June 2024. NSW DPIRD has recently secured \$35K from the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) and \$35K under the NEAP to maintain 11 estuarine sensors and fund the ongoing data feed by the current manufacturer and supplier ICT International for 12 months. Industry retain ownership of the sensors and are responsible for routine maintenance and cleaning.

DPIRD updated policies – Six aquaculture policies have been updated to reflect relevant legislative changes following the remake of the Fisheries Management (Aquaculture) Regulation. One new policy has been developed. The policies are available on the DPIRD Aquaculture website [here](#).

Updated policies:

- Clean-up program for aquaculture leases and cost recovery policy
- Aquaculture leases with cadastral boundary issues policy
- Aquaculture lease allocation policy
- Water to which an aquaculture permit may apply policy
- Extinguishment of priority oyster aquaculture area policy
- Way of access through aquaculture lease policy

New policy:

- Aquaculture permit application requirements and assessment policy

Aquaculture Vision Statement – The NSW DPIRD / industry Aquaculture Vision Statement was announced by Minister Moriarty on 4 September 2024 at the NSW Oyster Conference

stating a vision to grow aquaculture farmgate production to \$300M by 2030. A media release can be found [here](#).

NSW DPIRD and industry are developing a Roadmap that establishes actions and timelines designed to achieve the vision. A draft will be shared with oyster industry groups including Shellfish Committee, Aquaculture Research Advisory Committee, and NSW Farmers. DPIRD will consult with the framework of the Roadmap in November and undertake broader industry consultation in the new year.

Aquatic Biosecurity update – NSW DPIRD has commenced the final year of implementation of the three year QX Window of Infection study at Port Stephens, and research involving intermediate host interaction investigations, longitudinal port-wide surveillance at Port Stephens, molecular typing of *Martelia sydneyi* from various representative estuaries across NSW and the development of a new, more specific and sensitive qPCR tool for detection of *Martelia sydneyi*.

Shellfish farmer financial safety net – The outbreak of Qx in Port Stephens highlighted the vulnerability of the oyster industry to disease outbreaks. While natural disasters are covered with a joint commonwealth / state agreement, there are no arrangements in place for aquatic diseases. NSW Farmers have engaged Deloitte Access Economics to investigate the feasibility of different financial support measures that may be adopted to help the NSW oyster industry endure disease outbreaks and other major interruptions to supply. To date, Deloitte have explored a number of case studies of disease outbreaks across different sectors, have undertaken direct consultation with various groups, and have now whittled down a long-list of potential financial support measures to a short-list of 3 options that offer the greatest potential for the shellfish industry.

- An industry led common pool of funds (akin to a Trust account),
- Insurance products, and
- A formal agreement between state government and industry with tiered levels of support based on the extent of impact.

NSW Farmers will continue to engage industry members on the preferred option, and will be hosting a webinar on Thurs. 28th Nov. [Click here](#) for more details

The date for the next meeting of the NSW Shellfish Committee is 26 February 2025.