

Summary of meeting outcomes

NSW Shellfish Committee

26 February 2025

The NSW Shellfish Committee met via video conference 26 February 2025. 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
Industry representative - Mr. Brandon Armstrong
NSW Farmers Oyster Project Manager – Mr. Andy Myers

NSW DPIRD – NSW Food Authority:

A/CEO NSW Food Authority – Mr. Andrew Davies
NSW Shellfish Program Manager - Mr. Anthony Zammit

Invited attendees:

NSW Shellfish Program Senior Shellfish Officer – Mr. Phil Baker (Secretary)
NSW DPIRD Director Aquaculture – Mr. Ian Lyall
NSW DPIRD Senior Policy Officer Aquaculture – Dr. Emma Wilkie
NSW Oyster Extension Officer – Dr. Laura Stoltenberg
NSW Aquatic Biosecurity – Mr. Ben Rampano

Apologies:

Industry representative - Mrs. Pippa Boyton

Declaration conflict of interest:

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

1. Matters raised relating to the Seafood Food Safety Scheme

Harvest area management report – Annual reviews for 30 shellfish harvest areas were conducted since the November 2024 meeting with the NSW Shellfish Program completing all 80 harvest area annual reviews for the 2024 calendar year. 184 harvest area closures occurred since the previous meeting, with a total of 130 harvest area closures for the 2025 calendar year to date.

Vibrio risk management update – The NSW Food Authority is working with industry to improve understanding of *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* (Vp) risk factors associated with shellfish and inform implementation of appropriate risk management strategies. Vp is a nationally notifiable pathogen as of 1 January 2025. NSW Health has developed a protocol for managing Vp notifications whereby each public health unit will commence cluster investigations when two or more Vp cases are reported from different households within its area during a single incubation period (4 days).

Recent voluntary temperature logs of common oyster transport methods have provided varied results. Non-refrigerated transport in aluminium lined cardboard boxes were shown to exceed Sydney Rock oyster temperature requirements of 21°C throughout the entire

transport chain, refrigerated transport ranged between 12°C and 25°C while non-refrigerated transport with cool packs inside polystyrene boxes was the most stable with temperatures ranging between 6°C and 14°C. This data highlights the need for industry to verify that oysters remain at an acceptable temperature (below 21°C) during transport to ensure product safety and quality.

Development of a Local Shellfish Program Charter – A local shellfish program charter has been developed to assist local shellfish programs with guidance, administration and operations. Local shellfish programs operate as an extension of the NSW Shellfish Program so it is important that each program operates in a way that ensures equality, fairness and good governance. The charter explains what local shellfish programs are required to do in order to operate this way. The draft charter has been shared with the NSW Shellfish Committee, and once finalised, will be issued to all local shellfish programs and shared on the NSW Food Authority website.

ASQAP annual general meeting outcomes – The Australian Shellfish Quality Assurance Program (ASQAP) Committee met on 14 November 2024 in Sydney with a shellfish safety science day held the day prior. Outcomes from the 46th ASQAP meeting included.

- Reinstatement of harvest area export approvals is achievable with requests to be made by each state's shellfish control agency (NSW Shellfish Program). Any previously de-listed export areas can apply for re-listing with the NSW Shellfish Program.
- Biotoxin harmonisation proposal to Food Standards Australia New Zealand was approved which included a lowering of diarrhetic shellfish toxins (okadaic acid) to 0.16mg/kg and changing the reporting unit for paralytic shellfish toxins to mg saxitoxin dihydrochloride equivalent per kg.
- SafeFish Vp whole genome sequencing project is underway and will provide important information on national vibrio risks and possible management options.

Expression of interest for NSW Shellfish Committee – Membership of the existing NSW Shellfish Committee expires 14 April 2025 and a new committee will then be established. All licensed businesses with approval to harvest or collect shellfish in NSW will receive a link to an online form to express interest in membership of the new committee.

2. Non-food safety matters relating to shellfish

Posidonia monitoring program – NSW Farmers Association and the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) have drafted a seagrass monitoring project which has been provisionally approved for funding by FRDC and Oysters Australia. The project will facilitate the development and extension of a seagrass condition monitoring program, enabling farmers to directly monitor seagrass distribution and health across their leases. This industry data and information can then be used to inform appropriate Posidonia policy.

Oyster growers financial safety net – Deloitte Access Economics and NSW Farmers Association recently completed a project to investigate financial support measures for NSW oyster farmers in the event of disease and other significant supply disruptions. Project outcomes are available [here](#). Project recommendations and next steps will be considered as part the 2030 NSW Aquaculture Vision and Roadmap.

Aquaculture lease permit conditions - DPIRD recently reviewed all aquaculture lease conditions to ensure they are consistent with the new Aquaculture Regulation (2024) and the

NSW Oyster Industry Sustainable Aquaculture Strategy. All relevant lessees have been advised in writing of any changes to lease conditions.

Pacific Oyster cultivation in marine parks – Pacific Oysters have established wild populations from the Victorian border to the Hastings River on the Mid-North Coast. Accordingly, it is proposed that the state marine parks and aquatic reserve management review consider the culture of Pacific Oysters within some NSW marine parks.

Best practice floating raft guidelines – DPIRD published [best practice guidelines for raft construction](#) in 2021. These identified that all drums used as floatation devices must be clearly marked to indicate they are an “Aquaculture Floatation Device” by 2025. Accordingly, all drums used for aquaculture floatation must now be clearly marked. DPIRD Fisheries has limited supplies of marking tags or businesses may opt for alternative marking methods.

Sydney Rock Oyster breeding program – Funding has recently been secured for an independent technical review of the Sydney Rock Oyster Breeding Program to help guide the breeding program into the future. This review is expected to commence in April 2025 and include current practices, procedures, objectives, breeding goals, broodstock location and supply.

Emergency oyster relay areas – Goal 4 of the [NSW Aquaculture Vision Statement](#) identifies the value of establishing emergency relay areas as a flood risk management option. The Hawkesbury River and Wonboyn Lake estuaries have been selected as trial locations. DPIRD and NSW Farmers are working closely to identify the appropriate approval pathway to establish these areas, and details of how these areas may be practically used during a flood scenario.

Aquatic Biosecurity update – Repeated unexplained Pacific Oyster mortality events occurred in the Hawkesbury River in December 2024 and January 2025. Preliminary investigations did not identify any known infectious agent. The University of Sydney has been actively supporting growers with testing and is developing a project proposal to develop this work further.

Similar Pacific Oyster mortality events have occurred in Port Stephens since 2021. While no known infectious agent was identified, environmental factors may have been associated.

Growers are advised to report all unexplained oyster mortalities to DPIRD via the 24-hour hotline 1800 675 888.

The next meeting of the NSW Shellfish Committee is scheduled for 14 May 2025.