

## NSW Seafood Industry Forum

The primary objective of the NSW Seafood Industry Forum is to contribute to the Food Authority's goal of ensuring the production and sale of seafood products that are safe and suitable for human consumption, by advising on policy and practices introduced into provisions of the Seafood Safety Scheme as it relates to seafood and developed through a consultative process. Other government agencies may seek to use the broad expertise and experience of the Forum members to obtain advice on matters beyond the scope of the provisions of the Seafood Food Safety Scheme.

### Summary of outcomes

#### NSW Seafood Industry Forum

**17 September 2025**

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The NSW Seafood Industry Forum met via video conference on Wednesday, 17 September 2025. Issues considered by the Forum are outlined below.

#### Attendees

**NSW Seafood Industry Forum:** Olivia Churchill (De Costi Seafoods (Holdings) Pty Ltd), Ross Fidden (Commercial Fishermen's Co-operative Ltd), Michael Kitchener (The Master Fish Merchants' Association of Australia), Erik Poole (Sydney Fish Market Pty Ltd), Russell Sydenham (NSW Aquaculture Association Inc).

**NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DIPRD) – Biosecurity & Food Safety:** Andrew Davies (Acting Director, Food Safety & CEO NSW Food Authority), Debra Doolan (Team Leader, Animal Welfare Policy & Programs), Jaime Garcia (Secretariat), Jeffrey Go (Senior Veterinary Officer Aquatic Biosecurity), Patrick Phillips (Team Leader, Regulatory Operations),

**Apologies:** Derrick Addison (Food and Beverage Importers Association), Eric Davis (Manager, Food Policy & Partnerships), Christopher Melham (NSW Wild Harvest Fishers Inc), Deneale Zahra (Clarence River Fishermen's Co-operative Ltd), Melissa Walker (Manager Aquatic Biosecurity Programs).

#### Conflict of interest declaration

Members confirmed that they had no conflicts of interest.

#### Industry updates

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

- The Commercial Fishermen's Co-operative Ltd reported that retail trading has been consistent for the last 6 months, and catches continue to be on the high side. It has concerns for its members with the amount of work and costs associated with the new requirements for seafood products to be covered at the Sydney Fish Markets.
- The Master Fish Merchants' Association reported the following:
  - It will be moving into its new premises at the new Sydney Fish Markets.

- After a lengthy process involving buyer feedback, several iterations, and improvements, new auction software has been implemented at Sydney Fish Market.
- It is extremely pleased with the final version of the new bidding terminals at the New Sydney Fish Markets. The new terminals are touchscreen tablets that have exceeded expectations.
- The final visit by buyers to view the new Sydney Fish Markets has been completed. This visit was part of a consultation group established to address the logistics of moving seafood products from the new market, with new challenges due to the design of the premises. Moving seafood products will require transportation down to a car park and through lifts. This group will continue to address various issues, but overall, it is looking forward to settling into the Sydney Fish Markets.
- The Sydney Fish Markets are scheduled to relocate to their new premises by the end of 2025. However, the “open roof design” above Sydney Fish Markets' operational areas has raised concerns among members. To mitigate risk, all seafood products, with the exception of live products, must be covered with a plastic sheet, plastic liner, or lid due to the lack of a ceiling. This requirement will result in both time and financial costs for seafood suppliers. The covering of seafood products will need to occur at the beginning of the supply chain. Live seafood is typically packaged in lidded crates or enclosed paper cartons/ foam boxes, eliminating the need for additional covering. Seafood suppliers began trialling the new covering procedures in September 2025. This requirement will be mandatory once operations commence at the new Sydney Fish Markets.
- The Sydney Fish Market has spent six months exploring various options and methods for covering seafood products. Specific specifications were developed and distributed to suppliers in July 2025. [Supplier Packing Specification](#).
- Officers from NSW DPIRD Compliance Unit are collaborating with the Sydney Fish Markets to develop and ensure compliance with the new Food Safety Program. The Food Safety program is currently in draft form, and ongoing reviews will focus on the requirements for covering seafood products as a mitigation measure to ensure compliance in the future.
- Members were informed that wild shellfish harvesters in NSW must be approved and licenced with the NSW Food Authority to legally harvest and sell bivalve shellfish for human consumption. In addition to holding a Food Authority licence, harvesters are required to meet the standards of the NSW Shellfish Program, participate in a Harvest and Hold Scheme, and ensure harvesting occurs only from approved and classified areas. The Sydney Fish Market currently has no way of confirming if harvesters are complying with these requirements. This information is kept by the Food Authority Licensing and shellfish units and, due to privacy requirements, cannot be shared. The Sydney Fish Markets is proposing a system similar to South Australia's primary method for tracking wild shellfish harvesting, known as the South Australian Shellfish Quality Assurance Program (SASQAP). It has been agreed that the DPIRD Compliance unit will explore the feasibility of adapting this system for reporting compliance with NSW shellfish harvesting requirements.

## **1) Matters raised relating to the Seafood Food Safety Scheme**

### **Food safety compliance report**

Members were updated on seafood industry compliance activities for the 2024-25 financial year to date. 94 percent of licensed seafood businesses recorded an acceptable audit and/or inspection result, a one percent drop compared to the previous financial year. A

total of 198 audits and inspections were conducted during this period, with a combined total of 28 regulatory interventions (improvement notices, prohibition orders, or warning letters).

The Regulatory Operations team continues to support key stakeholders, including regulated businesses, by providing guidance and educational materials to enhance compliance. The Team may need to adjust its planned activities and frequency of compliance monitoring depending on emerging risks and strategic priorities. Complaints, inspections, and investigations relating to seafood businesses will continue to be managed on an as needs basis. Members were advised of administrative changes within the Regulatory Operations Unit, which are not expected to affect compliance operations.

## **2) Other matters raised**

### **Aquatic Biosecurity update**

The Aquatic Biosecurity Programs unit provided an update on the detection of White Spot wild school prawns from inshore oceanic waters near the river mouths of the Clarence, Evans, and Richmond Rivers in March and April 2025. This period coincided with the last round of proof-of-freedom surveillance attempts for the region.

Discussions regarding the future management of White Spot in NSW have included national dialogue within the Aquatic Consultative Committee of Emergency Animal Disease (Aquatic CCEAD). A proposal was made to separate the estuarine areas with no detections from the oceanic areas where detections had occurred; however, this proposal did not receive support from the Aquatic CCEAD or its parent body, the National Biosecurity Committee.

The DPIRD Biosecurity unit is in communication with prawn fishers in affected areas in the Clarence, Richmond and Evans River areas advising them that long-term management of White Spot in these areas is still being finalised. This included meetings with industry on 16 and 17 September.

Fishers have been asked to consider merging the two White Spot detection zones as part of the ongoing consultation process. NSW DPIRD will consider this feedback for future management of White Spot in NSW.

Communication messages issued throughout the White Spot response continue to reassure consumers that white spot is not a threat to human health or food safety and that NSW seafood, including prawns, remains safe to eat.

Further information is available at: <https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fishing/aquatic-biosecurity/aquaculture/aquaculture/white-spot>

### **Country of Origin Labelling (CoOL)**

DPIRD's Local Government Unit provided a paper updating the forum on new national Country of origin labelling (CoOL) requirements for ready to eat seafood introduced under Australian Consumer Law (ACL). Information from the Australian Government indicates the new requirements aim to help consumers make more informed decisions about the seafood they choose to eat. Hospitality businesses such as restaurants, cafes and pubs will be required to label dishes containing seafood with country of origin information from 1 July 2026. Seafood must be labelled as Australian, Imported or a Mix of both.

Businesses will need to label seafood dishes using the AIM labelling system - A for Australian, I for imported or M for mixed origin - in a way that is obvious to customers before they order. The labelling information can be on:

- printed and online menus
- a menu board
- a clear sign in the business.

Businesses can choose the type of label that works best for them.

For example:

- Grilled barramundi (A) or
- Grilled barramundi (Australian) or
- We only serve Australian seafood

The rules apply to seafood dishes served for immediate consumption, regardless of whether the food is eaten on the premises, takeaway or delivered.

These requirements do not fall under DPIRD or local Councils' food regulatory staff. NSW Fair Trading is the NSW regulatory agency responsible for enforcing ACL in NSW.

Further information including the types of business affected, dishes that need to be labelled, exemptions and examples can be found at [Seafood labelling laws are changing for hospitality businesses | business.gov.au](#)

### **Update on South Australian Algal Bloom update**

NSW DPIRD's Animal Biosecurity unit provided a paper updating the forum on the harmful algal bloom, predominantly consisting of *Karenia* phytoplankton, which has impacted South Australian waters since March 2025. This bloom includes multiple *Karenia* species and potentially toxic organisms like *Karlodinium* sp.

The situation has severely impacted the seafood industry and local communities, causing:

- Widespread mortality in marine life, including fish and mammals.
- Closure of commercial bivalve shellfish harvesting areas.
- Respiratory issues for coastal residents and visitors.
- Declines in local seafood sales and tourism.

Unlike previous blooms of *Karenia mikimotoi*, which do not produce brevetoxins, the current bloom has been found to generate high levels of brevetoxin, marking its first detection in Australian waters. While blooms of *Karenia brevis* are common in the Gulf of Mexico and are known to produce brevetoxins, these have not previously been detected in South Australia. Four *Karenia* species have been isolated from the affected SA area, with ongoing efforts to identify which are producing brevetoxin. Identification of these species is complex due to their morphological similarities and the fragility of cells during sample preservation, making molecular techniques vital for risk management.

The continuing South Australian algal bloom raises uncertainty about how warming summer water temperatures will affect *Karenia* growth and therefore increase or decrease the bloom's impact.

The detection of brevetoxin in Australian waters is of national concern. Identifying the specific *Karenia* species producing this toxin is crucial for monitoring and assessing potential impacts in other states. While over two decades of monitoring by the NSW shellfish industry

has detected low levels of *Karenia* species, national monitoring for brevetoxin has been limited prior to the current South Australian bloom.

Key gaps identified during the current event include:

- No accredited Australian brevetoxin testing facilities requiring analysis to be done in New Zealand.
- Insufficient funding for harmful algal bloom research and monitoring, limiting Australian research response capacity.
- No established protocols for closing impacted fisheries and understanding/assessing risks of moving affected seafood to unaffected areas for brevetoxin depuration.

The South Australian government and researchers are addressing key issues related to brevetoxins. A new testing facility will be operational within three months, and research is underway to identify the species producing these toxins. However, additional funding is crucial, as many scientists have been working 'for free' and the research may stall without financial support. It's vital to ensure funding to inform national brevetoxin risk management strategies.

NSW will monitor the evolving situation and continue to support research in this area to ensure we are prepared in case a harmful algal bloom affects NSW. Funding applications aimed at identifying the species and developing rapid testing methods should be prioritised as a national concern for the seafood industry.

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