

## 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

6 May 2026

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The NSW Seafood Industry Forum met via video conference on Wednesday, 6 May 2026. Issues considered by the Forum are outlined below.

### Attendees

**NSW Seafood Industry Forum:** Olivia Churchill (De Costi Seafoods (Holdings) Pty Ltd), Rosie Hickey (Sydney Fish Market Pty Ltd), Jack Hill (Food and Beverage Importers Association), David Hogan (Fishing Industry NSW In), Michael Kitchener (The Master Fish Merchants' Association of Australia), 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), Eric Davis (Manager, Food Policy & Partnerships), Jaime Garcia (Secretariat), Jeffrey Go (Senior Veterinary Officer Aquatic Biosecurity), Mark Mackie (Manager, Regulatory Operations), Anthony Zammit (Manager, Shellfish Program).

**Apologies:** David Cusack (Manager Food Standards & Programs), Ross Fidden (Commercial Fishermen's Co-operative Ltd), Erik Pool (Sydney Fish Market Pty Ltd), Deneale Zahra (Clarence River Fishermen's Co-operative Ltd).

### 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:

- Sydney Fish Markets updated the Committee on the new Sydney Fish Market, which opened on 19 January 2026. This marked a significant shift in operations from the previous single level layout to the new multi-storey, state of the art facility at Blackwattle Bay. Quality control has also improved due to implementation of advanced

temperature control systems which significantly enhance product freshness. The new facility has completed all necessary quality assurance, including Food Authority audits, Export Registration Audits, and Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) certifications.

- The Fish Merchants Association has reported that retailers that purchase through the auction at the new Sydney fish markets are adapting to new workflows, including transporting products using lifts. However, its members have expressed concerns about the 81 cents per kilogram fuel levy applied to purchases through the auction. They note that different types of catches require varying amounts of fuel, while wholesalers are also facing a fuel levy from suppliers that ranges from 16 cents to \$1.70 per kilogram. This is a stressful time for its members due to a severe drop in demand for seafood as a result of the current global situation and higher interest rates.
- The NSW Aquaculture Association Inc reported a decline in demand for land-based seafood products. At least one hatchery has lost all its stocks during the summer heatwave. Factors such as the cost of living, water shortages, and rising fuel prices are impacting its members, leading some farms to cut employment hours. Restaurants are experiencing slower trade, with some even closing their doors entirely.

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

### **Food safety compliance report**

Members were updated on seafood industry compliance activities for the period of July to December 2025. 96 percent of licensed seafood businesses recorded an acceptable audit and/or inspection result, a one percent increase compared to the previous financial year. A total of 125 audits and inspections were conducted during this period, with a combined total of 20 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.

## **2) Other matters raised**

### **NSW DPIRD White Spot update**

The Aquatic Biosecurity unit provided an update on the following:

In 2023, white spot disease was detected in prawn farms near the Clarence River, and in 2024, the white spot syndrome virus (WSSV) was found in wild school prawns off Evans Head and the Richmond River. NSW DPIRD aimed for self-declaration of WSSV freedom in designated control zones if the virus was not detected over four surveillance events spanning two years. However, detections of WSSV in wild school prawns in April and May 2025 indicate its ongoing presence in the area, making self-declaration of freedom unlikely in the near future.

As a result, the separate control orders for the Clarence and Evans/Richmond Rivers were merged on 9 December 2025, into a new [Biosecurity \(white spot disease\) Control Order 2025](#) for five years. This new zone restricts the movement of uncooked prawns and other crustaceans, but exemptions apply to cooked prawns, processed products (e.g. dried/canned), and high-value species like mud crabs, blue swimmer crabs, lobsters, and bugs.

NSW DPIRD held meetings in Maclean and Ballina with affected fishers and farms to outline this change to future WSSV management. An additional \$4.5 million financial assistance package was announced on 10 December 2025 to assist impacted fishers exit the industry and provide funding for voluntary share and business surrender as well as business training options.

*The date for the next meeting of the NSW Seafood Industry Forum is 14 October 2026.*