

## Summary of meeting outcomes

### NSW Seafood Industry Forum

12 May 2021

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The NSW Seafood Industry Forum met via video conference on 12 May 2021. Specific issues considered by the Forum at its meeting are outlined below.

#### **Attendees**

**NSW Seafood Industry Forum members:** Danielle Adams (Clarence River Co-operative Ltd), Tricia Beatty (Professional Fisher's Association Inc), Mark Boulter (Seafood Importers' Association of Australasia Inc), 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), Matthew Wilkinson (De Costi Seafoods (Holdings) Pty Ltd).

**NSW DPI – Biosecurity & Food Safety:** Helen Chen (Senior Project Officer International Engagement), Eric Davis (Manager, Food Policy & Partnerships), Jaime Garcia (Secretariat), Jeffrey Go (Senior Veterinary Officer Aquatic Biosecurity), Mark Mackie (Manager Audit Systems & Verification), Ian Sanders (Director International Engagement), Helen Schaefer (Team Leader, Animal Welfare Policy & Programs), Lisa Szabo - Chair (Director Food Safety & CEO NSW Food Authority).

**Apologies:** Geneveive Bonello, Manager (Communications Strategic Programs & Partnerships), Sarah Britton (NSW Chief Veterinary Officer and Group Director Animal Biosecurity), David Cusack (Manager Food Standards & Programs), Peter Day (Director Compliance & Integrity Systems), Suzanne Robinson (Director, Animal Welfare), Kerry Strangas (The Master Fish Merchants Association), Melissa Walker (Team Leader Aquatic Biosecurity Policy & Programs).

#### **Industry updates**

Members provided updates on key and emerging issues in their respective industry sectors with the recovery of flood affected areas currently front of mind. Industry has started the recovery process, with recovery hubs set up along the Hawkesbury River to aid recovery, and to work with Service NSW to identify fishers who need additional assistance.

Flood impacts include lost vessels and vessels continuing to hit submerged logs. There are also disruption to oyster farmers, pipi leases and harvesting of mullet and school prawns.

Members reported the current mouse plague is concerning to the retail seafood industry as a food safety issue.

Members were advised of the Young Fishers Program being rolled out under DPI's Young Farmers program in conjunction with Professional Fisherman's Association. Workshops are being held from the Tweed to Wollongong, and initial feedback is positive.

Industry reported a mixed bag of fortunes, with exports struggling and the fresh seafood retail sector doing well.

There is considerable sampling underway across Australia by DPI Fisheries, Safefood, and Safefish to address Chinese concerns regarding heavy metal in lobsters. The industry is also looking to re-open markets and find additional export markets which has been challenging. There has also been some pivoting towards trade within Australia and New Zealand to

replace exports. While some parts of the seafood industry such as the mullet fishery are doing it tough, retail sales for some seafood lines are up by 50% on pre-Covid levels so some parts of the industry are also doing well. Covid closedowns are also affecting the service sector.

There has been some good news using value adding to increase the percentage of eel quota utilised. Products like smoked eel pate are starting to find a place in the market.

A mental health program (Stay Afloat) is being run by Seafood Industry Australia with trials in the Newcastle area. There are also morning teas to promote mental health and well-being up and down the coastline, with plans for future barbeques as well.

NSW seafood promotions will be running again this month with TV adds promoting NSW seafood from local fishers and co-ops.

There is also work underway to assess a Shoalhaven area for cockle harvesting.

The committee discussed an aspiration for training to help fishers handle their product. DPI will progress this issue for consideration at the next meeting.

It was noted that NSW seafood buyers cannot buy western Victorian abalone given concerns about viral ganglioneuritis in that fishery.

Ciguatera sampling is underway to collect good contemporary data to help inform industry practices given some of the existing data dates back to the 1980's.

### **Food Safety Compliance Report**

The Committee noted a report on seafood industry compliance activities from 1 July 2020 to 31 December 2020. 96% of the licensed seafood sector recorded an acceptable audit and/or inspection result which is a 1% increase over the previous period. There were 115 audits and 161 inspections during this period. 68 fishing vessels were also inspected recording a high compliance rate of 99%. The Compliance & Integrity Systems Team continues to focus its efforts on fishing vessel inspections to maintain a high compliance rate within this sector.

The top three non-conformances observed during the reporting period were process control (38%), food safety program (25%), analytical and testing (13%). Enforcement actions included six Improvement Notices. The Compliance Team is very satisfied with the high compliance rate recorded for the seafood industry sector during this reporting period.

### **White spot disease update**

Jeffrey Go presented a paper and updated the committee on White Spot Disease (WSD), unfortunately detected again in southeast Queensland and appears to have established in this area.

Members noted that, in February 2021, the Aquatic Consultative Committee on Emergency Animal Diseases (AquaCCEAD) considered extensive surveillance data from 2017 through to 2020 and concluded WSD had established in some populations of crustaceans in south east Queensland but was absent from all other areas in Australia. Eradication therefore is no longer a viable option, but containment and control to prevent spread from the Qld MRA to the remainder of Australia remains feasible.

A movement restriction area (MRA) has been established for the affected area and a formal NSW Biosecurity Control Order has been put in place restricting movement of high-risk products (uncooked decapod crustaceans and polychaete worms) into NSW.

Additional surveillance north and south of the Qld MRA will be undertaken for the next two years (2021 and 2022) to demonstrate ongoing efficacy of the movement restrictions. All NSW samples tested to date have been negative, including samples tested from autumn 2021

It is important to acknowledge that extensive active surveillance shows no evidence of WSD in NSW prawn farms or wild populations.

Public consultation was undertaken regarding the risk assessment for resumption of trade in bloodworms from south-east Queensland, and a determination has been made that the trade in bloodworms from the south-east Queensland control area into NSW could resume under permit and specified conditions.

### **Reports of ulcerated fish from commercial and recreational fishers**

Jeffrey Go presented a paper and informed Members that NSW DPI has received reports of ulcerated fish from commercial and recreational fishers in a number of NSW estuaries. Epizootic ulcerative syndrome (EUS) or “red spot disease” is a disease caused by the fungus, *Aphanomyces invadans* that is widespread in aquatic environments. It is known to occur in various estuaries of NSW, particularly in the Northern Rivers region. Cases of EUS have historically been confirmed in NSW as far south as the Hawkesbury River.

Although *Aphanomyces invadans* is not known to affect humans, severely ulcerated fish should not be eaten due to the potential for secondary invasion of ulcers by other pathogens.

EUS can affect a very wide range of fish, with mullet, bream and whiting frequently affected during periods of EUS activity. EUS remains a notifiable disease in NSW, and NSW DPI will co-ordinate representative sampling and testing of ulcerated fish for EUS. Fresh fish should be refrigerated or kept on ice, but not frozen.

### **Correspondence regarding food safety criteria for the fish to be used raw**

The committee discussed food safety criteria for fish consumed raw or partially cooked. It was noted that Safefish has started work in this area and the committee agreed to wait until this work is completed and then invite Safefish to present its findings to this committee.

### **Biosecurity update**

Jeffrey Go updated members on the recent detection abalone viral ganglioneuritis (AVG) in western Victoria. AVG affects abalone central nervous system. NSW has implemented a Biosecurity Control Order to prevent importation of wild abalone from western Victoria. Only abalone from eastern Victoria is permitted into NSW. Members noted that with the help of Sydney Fish Markets this message was conveyed to stakeholders in a timely manner.

AVG was subsequently detected in a number of abalone live holding premises in Sydney and is the focus of a significant emergency response. A Control Order was therefore initially implemented to prohibit movement of live abalone into and within NSW. Subsequently, limited trade of live wild abalone of NSW origin has been resumed.

( [https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/1313585/Notice-Movement-restrictions-on-abalone-into,-out-of-and-within-NSW-extended-until-12-June-2021.pdf](https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/1313585/Notice-Movement-restrictions-on-abalone-into,-out-of-and-within-NSW-extended-until-12-June-2021.pdf))

### **International Engagement update**

Helen Chen gave a verbal update on the current work being done to help industry find new markets for high value seafood products, with members noting a recent Webinar event in March 2021, held in conjunction with DPI and the Hong Kong Trade Development Council, focused on promoting Premium Murray Cod into the Hong Kong market and beyond.

Members also noted the upcoming webinar in partnership with China Aquatic Products Processing and Marketing Alliance (CAPPMA) to help promote Sydney Rock Oyster and Blacklip Abalones into Chinese markets, with cooking demonstrations and taste testing events.

*The next meeting of the NSW Seafood Industry Forum will be held on Wednesday 15 September 2021.*