

TIDE TO TABLE

RESTORING AQUATIC HABITAT

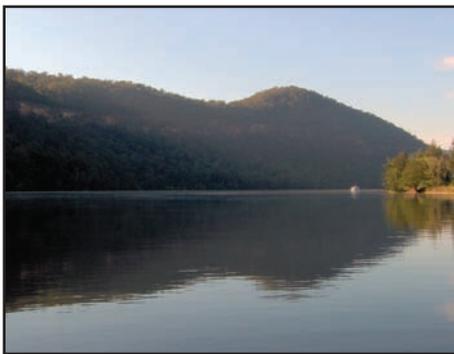
Hawkesbury Nepean & Hunter Central Rivers



HEALTHY CATCHMENTS
HEALTHY OCEANS

Restoring Fish Habitat & Improving Water Quality

The Tide to Table project focuses on repairing the environment that marine life relies upon for food, shelter, breeding and good health. The program works to combine the needs of the seafood industry with management actions occurring on the land. As such, professional fishers, oyster farmers and land based producers, local and state government, and recreational fishers work together to support projects that involve on-ground rehabilitation works. These works aim to improve the fish habitat and water quality that in turn support and build sustainable seafood resources for the future. To support the on-ground works, there is also a strong education component to the program that includes community events, workshops, brochures and media.



Hawkesbury River near Spencer



Inspecting a saltmarsh site on the Manning River



Myall River at Tea Gardens

Hawkesbury Nepean & Hunter Central Rivers

The Tide to Table model was initially developed by OceanWatch Australia as a pilot project in the Sydney region, restoring fish habitat and addressing poor water quality at 30 sites across the region. The program has been extended and there are currently four Tide to Table projects operating in NSW and Queensland.

The Hawkesbury-Nepean and Hunter-Central Rivers project began in early 2007, and will be undertaking works in the waterways between the Hawkesbury Nepean and Manning River catchments. The project is a partnership between OceanWatch Australia, NSW Department of Primary Industries (Fisheries), NSW Farmers Association and NSW Food Authority. Funding has been provided by the Hawkesbury-Nepean and Hunter-Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority's through the Australian Governments National Landcare Program.

The types of works that will be funded as part of the project include:

- fencing off valuable wetlands to prevent damage from recreational activities and stock
- restoring degraded wetlands
- addressing acid sulfate soil issues
- stabilising banks to prevent erosion by planting native trees
- increasing areas of fish habitat through resnagging
- modifying or removing structures that are barriers to fish passage (eg floodgates)

Snapshot: HAWKESBURY PRAWN TRAWL

Since 1946 the Hawkesbury River has sustainably provided various types of seafood to the fish eating public, and bait to recreational fishers. Hawkesbury school prawns are the largest on the east coast, and both the squid and prawns obtain the highest prices at the Sydney Fish Markets. The River provides 97% of all estuarine caught squid in NSW, and is the second biggest producer of seafood in NSW!

Prawns are harvested from the mouth of the river to as far upstream as Lower Portland, depending on weather and conditions. While squid inhabit the very lower reaches, prawns inhabit the entire estuary as far upstream as North Richmond. Some 56% of the estuary is permanently closed to trawling, and in an average day less than 4% of the estuary is trawled.

Most of the trawlers are one-person operations, with relatively small boats that usually work between September and June each year, when the prawns are more prolific.



Part of the days catch....

The Hawkesbury is generally a calm and picturesque river, however, floods and extreme weather can still wreak havoc at times.



Gary Howard sorting through a mass of *Egeria* caught in the net

There are also other problems to deal with on a daily basis. Prawn trawl fishermen Gary Howard (pictured left) believes that environmentally the Hawkesbury is at risk, and therefore so are the futures of the fishermen and their families.

Water quality is being compromised from various pollution sources, which are affecting the long-term sustainability of the river, and noxious weeds are also a major problem. *Egeria densa* (among others) is a weed found in the upper Hawkesbury, where it forms dense mats in the lower water column, clogging nets and making life difficult for trawlers. The weed is also often mistaken by observers to be native seagrass, creating a misconception that the trawlers are impacting on seagrass beds.

There is also another common misconception, about prawn trawl by-catch. Hawkesbury trawlers are often believed to account for large amounts of by-catch, when in reality there is usually very little, and most is returned to the river alive anyway!

The life of a Hawkesbury River trawler is not always easy, and misconceptions by the public aren't always appreciated, but as Gary says, "when you have an office as good as the Hawkesbury River, we wouldn't have it any other way! The hard part is going to be keeping it that way!"

Gary Howard is actively involved in the Tide to Table program, and sits on the Steering Committee representing commercial fisherman in the Hawkesbury Nepean region.

For more information about Tide to Table, or to discuss a potential rehabilitation site, please contact:

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National Landcare Program