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## Oyster Industry EMS Projects

The future of the oyster industry depends on our capacity to demonstrate that natural resources, and the environment in which we work, are utilised in a sustainable, responsible way. One way of doing this is to develop an Environmental Management System (EMS) to show how environmental impacts and risks are managed.

OceanWatch Australia (in partnership with the NSW Farmers' Association) and Southern Rivers Catchment Management Authority have respectively received \$400,000 and \$240,000 through the Australian Government's 'Caring for our Country' program, to develop, review and implement Environmental Management Systems for the oyster industry state-wide.

Participation in an Environmental Management System is voluntary; however engaging in the process offers significant benefits, including the opportunity to:

- Document farmers current stewardship of the environment and aspirations
- Identify realistic and achievable environmental improvements
- Identify external water quality concerns and engage with landholders
- Increase profits by identifying business development opportunities
- Increases exposure to, and prospects of, receiving grants



Photo: Andy Myers



Photo: Plastic baskets



## EMS Projects Continued...

To gain maximum benefit from the process, estuary-wide EMS are the most effective and efficient approach. For the oyster industry, this means engaging with as many oyster farmers in the catchment as possible.

The Broken Bay Oyster Association, currently working on their 5<sup>th</sup> revision of an estuary-wide EMS, recognises the benefits of the document, and the collaborative approach to environmental management.

John Stubbs, President of the Broken Bay Oyster Association, states that *'a cooperative approach has allowed growers to work together to address current and future challenges, and has improved business stability. The EMS in particular has brought growers together to pursue goals and outcomes of common interest, which benefit all Broken Bay Oyster members, and other users and stakeholders of the Hawkesbury River.'*

*'As oyster growers, we have an intrinsic vested interest in the health of the estuary, and the EMS is an important document that demonstrates our commitment to environmental sustainable practices. It's surprising, when you look at your everyday activities there are already lots of things you do which safe-guard the environment - from minimising wash to preventing oil-spills. An EMS documents these actions, demonstrating our environmental awareness.*

*Through the EMS we've also been able to identify and prioritise risks, allowing us to create an action plan to tackle some of the internal and external issues. Through this process we've successfully worked with the National Parks & Wildlife Service to get some composting toilets installed at a couple of campgrounds up river, and are currently raising awareness of the impacts of illegal pump-outs from house-boats. The EMS has given us leverage to tackle some of these issues.'*

Elsewhere, Environmental Management Systems have been pivotal in securing grant money for 'on ground' works. The EMS endorsed by the Clyde River EMS Cluster Group on the South Coast of NSW has allowed members to secure some \$80,000 of cumulative funding to address some of the risks identified through the EMS process.

Incentives will also be available through these current projects to implement actions identified in EMS's, and improve environmental conditions in oyster producing estuaries.

Across NSW two funding pools will be available:

- \$100,000 for oyster growers to make internal (on farm) improvements, and
- \$100,000 for growers and landholders to address external influences affecting water quality in oyster growing areas

In Southern Rivers catchments additional grant funding will be available:

- \$150,000 to assist growers who wish to convert from tarred-stick to environmentally friendly cultivation infrastructure, including plastics
- \$50,000 to rehabilitate water quality hotspots in the Pambula catchment

All grant money will be distributed through an 'Expression of Interest' process. Calls for EOI's inviting oyster growers to apply for incentive funding will be advertised in June 2011.

This is a fantastic opportunity for the NSW Oyster Industry to demonstrate its environmental credentials and to access funds to support further improvements. Environmental Management Systems are highly sought documents, and Andy Myers an EMS Project Officer at OceanWatch Australia, is on hand to assist industry in their preparation. Whilst any EMS needs to be owned and driven by local farmers, Andy will be able guide the process, and compile EMS documents based on the information provided.

For more information, and to express your interest, please contact:

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These projects are supported by OceanWatch Australia, NSW Farmers' Association & Coastal NSW Catchment Management Authorities, through funding from the Australian Government's 'Caring for our Country' program.

## Oyster portal looks for industry insight

A new \$240,000 project will look to understand information from a range of environmental, climatic and industry sources, to help develop strategies and practices to prepare for climate change and pinpoint some of the potential causes that will affect the industry.

The oyster industry recognises that its success is interwoven with the environment and delivery of productive, healthy waters from the catchment and ocean and as such is vulnerable to catchment impacts and changes in the ocean due to climate change. During the last decades, the oyster industry has been competing with increasing activity in the coastal catchment areas for space on land and in water, and has suffered from decreasing water quality and increasing extent of disease outbreaks. Although farmers are aware of this relationship between the environment and oyster lease productivity, the links still need to be better understood to manage risks and ensure the survival of one of Australia's most sustainable and high profile seafood industries.

The oyster industry is already active in working with scientists towards improving its resilience to climate change by ensuring their natural environment is healthy. The industry recently joined forces across three states to collaborate with researchers at the Adaptation Network for Marine Biodiversity and Resources at the University of Tasmania to identify what key challenges might lie ahead. The recent publication "*Climate change adaptation in the Australian edible oyster industry: an analysis of policy and practice*", identified the priorities for climate change adaptation in the oyster industry.

Now the University of Wollongong will respond to those priorities and work directly with industry, Catchment Management Authorities, State Government agencies and Councils to address the identified key priority "Investigation and development of improvements in coastal and estuarine monitoring programs, which integrate automated and other monitoring and utilise a central repository for data".

Project leader, Associate Professor Andrew Davis, from the University of Wollongong, explains that this project will take complex information and will integrate it into a web-based portal that will allow farmers to access this information and interpret it with relevance to their own lease productivity, operations and closure events. The project will focus on particular estuaries and oyster leases for case studies to demonstrate the concept and potential benefits, and it is anticipated that the concept will be expanded nationally.

Oyster growers are encouraged to contact the research team if they are interested in being part of the industry working group that would assist us with putting together a helpful information tool for oyster growers.

The project is funded from the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation, Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency on behalf of the Australian Government, the Southern and Northern Rivers Catchment Management Authorities and Bega Valley Shire Council.

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## Pacific Oyster Mortality Syndrome

NSW authorities are investigating a recent kill of Pacific oysters in Botany Bay and Port Jackson estuary systems.

Authorities have been testing oysters and water quality to explain what is being termed a Pacific Oyster Mortality Syndrome.

Investigations have confirmed the presence of a virus affecting Pacific oysters in both of these estuaries.

Farmed and wild Pacific oysters in the Georges River, Botany Bay, have been impacted and precautionary controls have been put in place to prevent movements of oysters and oyster farming equipment from the Georges River to any other NSW river.

There are no Georges River Pacific oysters currently being sold and the NSW Food Authority confirms that oysters from NSW are safe to eat. NSW

Health advises there is no risk to human health associated with this event.

Australia's biosecurity and quality control regimes, both on imported and locally grown products, are designed to ensure that consumer products are of a high quality and safe to eat.

The Oyster Committee has been working closely with Industry and Investment NSW on this issue and will continue to monitor the situation as time progresses.

### **Healthy Estuaries for Healthy Oysters – Partnerships with Local Government**

For a number of years now, the Oyster Committee has been focusing on the septic management programs of Coastal Councils as a key issue of concern for the oyster industry. The Committee has long been seeking an audit of these programs to gain an understanding of which Councils are leading the way in minimising the risks of septic contamination in waterways and where additional resources may be required.

The Committee's most recent action on this issue was to write to the NSW Aquaculture Steering Committee to seek assistance with this matter. It is pleasing to report that the Steering Committee looked favorably on this matter and agreed on an action to draw up a project proposal and seek funding for it.

The Oyster Committee will continue to work with Industry and Investment NSW on this issue.

### **Oysters in the House**

In 2007, the Oyster Committee embarked on a new approach to the promotion and marketing of NSW Oysters. The approach focused on an event that would showcase oysters to the general public, educate the public, provide a forum for lobbying and further raise the profile of oysters amongst the restaurant and commercial trade. As a result 'Oysters in the House' was born.

Since inception Oysters in the House events have attracting in excess of 1,000 people.

No event was held in 2010, due to a decision to change the event and general approach. The next Oysters in the House event will be held towards the end of 2011 in a much larger venue which will allow far greater reach in marketing terms. More information on the details of this event will be provided in the next update.

### **NSW Oyster Field Days**

The NSW Oyster field days will be held again this year. The dates and venues for the events will be determined at the Oyster Committee meeting in the coming weeks, but at this stage they are likely to be held sometime in September 2011. More information about the specific details of the field days will be provided in the next Oyster Update newsletter in May/June 2011.

### **Raleigh Dairy Proposal**

The Oyster Committee has recently written to the Bellingen Shire Council raising concerns about a development proposal by Raleigh Dairy to construct an intensive dairy on the flood plains in the region. This proposal has been raised as a matter of concern by a number of Oyster Members in the local region.

The Oyster Committee wrote seeking that any potential approval is compliant with the terms outlined in the Oyster Industry Sustainable Aquaculture Strategy.

### **Classifieds**

**Plastic Oyster Baskets**- Used, 5 baskets on each 2 stick unit, 12mm and 17mm mesh.

Cheap, price discounted for bulk purchase!

Contact Don Or Mark 0407224151 or 0418989300.

### **Sydney Rock Single Seed Oysters**

Various sizes available Contact Bruce- 0417 841 049