

**Summary of Discussion**  
**Aquaculture Research Advisory Committee (ARAC) meeting**  
**13 April 2016**

ARAC met in Sydney on 13 April 2016. Wayne O'Connor welcomed everyone to this 27th meeting of ARAC.

- 1 ARAC supported an application (late last year) from Oceanwatch who sought funding for an Extension Officer. This was through the Local Landcare Coordinators Initiative for not-for-profit organisations (such as Oceanwatch) to apply for funding to appoint Landcare coordinators – in this case with the sole purpose of providing extension services to the oyster industry. The application was successful and Mr Andy Myers is now a part-time extension officer for the oyster industry. ARAC will seek to support extension activities and encourage farmer interaction.
- 2 The effectiveness of probiotics in the use of aquaculture has been raised at ARAC and we have been advised the National Aquaculture Council are very supportive on the issues of the breakdown of environmental waste and promoting fish health. It is hoped to have an expert on probiotics present at an upcoming ARAC meeting to provide advice.
- 3 Aquatic Biosecurity team updated:
  - Pacific Oyster mortality investigations in the Clyde, Tweed, Crookhaven Rivers and Port Stephens estuary, during January to March 2015, found no evidence to indicate any disease. The only common factor seemed to be high water temperatures.
  - The Committee asked has there been research on the impacts of prolonged high temperatures on Pacific Oysters? Or major variations in water temperature on a regular basis?
  - A recent detection of Epizootic Ulcerative Syndrome (EUS) or Red spot disease in Murray Cod has occurred in the Darling River. EUS is caused by a fungus (*Aphanomyces invadans*) and shows as red lesions (sores) or deep ulcers .
- 4 Matthew Wassnig provided information relating to the FRDC restructure and the direction for the new Research Advisory Committees (RACs) (formerly known as the FRABs).
- 5 New research update:
  - DPI has announced that the commercial partner for development of the Marine Aquaculture Research Lease (MARL) off Port Stephens is Huon Aquaculture, a prominent Australian Atlantic Salmon producer. It is anticipated for experimentation/ production to commence late in 2016.
  - NSW DPI is preparing a NSW Marine Waters Sustainable Aquaculture Strategy that will be available for comment in the near future. The strategy (like OISAS) will provide a platform for future marine aquaculture development.

- A FRDC/DPI funded draft review of the Murray Cod Industry RD&E needs has been undertaken with the outcomes to be presented at an Industry Workshop planned for late August this year.
- 6 The UTS application by Dr Kate Barclay to investigate the socioeconomic value of the NSW aquaculture industry was successful in obtaining funding of \$132,253 allocated by FRDC. ARAC are also contributing \$10,000 to the project. The NSW coastal aquaculture industry needs sound information about its economic and social contributions to coastal communities. This is important for its continued access to coastal resources and to address prevalent negative perceptions. Competing coastal uses, such as marine protected areas for conservation purposes or urban/industrial/tourism developments may compromise the viability of aquaculture. Currently there is no information available about the contribution aquaculture makes to NSW regional communities beyond the value of farm gate sales. The interviews have been completed with oyster and coastal land based facilities and the draft report should be completed by 30 June with the final report by 1 August.
- 7 Minor Use Permits (MUPs) remain an important issue nationally. The Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) administers a permits scheme that allows for the legal use of chemicals in certain ways that are contrary to the label instructions or, in certain circumstances allows for the limited use of an unregistered chemical product. There are differences between states at present and we are constrained in NSW regarding veterinary scripts as they only apply to one individual animal (not practical with a tank or pond full of fish). Industry requires MUPs and there are trade implications without them. NSW DPI and education facilities such as schools, TAFE's and Universities require MUPs. At present the National Aquaculture Council (NAC) approved MUPs only available to their members. The issue was raised with the national Aquaculture Committee to seek a resolution.
- NSW DPI is linking with the Freshwater Native Fish Assoc. (previously the Silver Perch Growers Assoc.) and the NSW Aquaculture Assoc. to put forward that registration should be more broadly spread for researchers ie. NSW DPI and education facilities such as schools, TAFE's and Universities who require MUPs.
  - Efforts are ongoing and the National Aquaculture Council is heavily involved in this process, however, industry are frustrated with the timeline. ARAC's preference would be for this to be resolved at a national level.
- 8 The FRDC Contribution for 2015/16 was discussed ie. the research levies that had been calculated for oysters and non-oyster aquaculture in NSW that are due to the FRDC. The money collected from oyster based levies goes to FRDC and, on advice from Oysters Australia, is used to support aquaculture research in NSW. A small portion of the levy contributes to the running of ARAC and to fund other small research activities. The contribution to FRDC is calculated at 0.25% average gross value of production (AGVP), based on three-year rolling averages. ARAC approved the dispersal of these funds to FRDC.
- 9 Oysters Australia (OA) provided new contact information for Wayne Hutchinson; the RD&E Manager for Oysters Australia based in Adelaide (Wayne replaces Rachel King in this role).

- 10 Wallis Lake oyster farmers are seeking research on why growth rates in their estuary are declining. NSW DPI funded an extension of the NSW Oyster Strategy consultancy brief to better understand the productivity decline in Wallis Lake. This was carried out by ACIL Allen and JP Van Moort met with growers in May 2015. The review identified: productivity decline; production systems; marketing and training, access to business support and intra-industry collaboration as key areas that need attention.
  - A working group has been established to investigate possible causes for the poor oyster performance at the major nursery areas. The working group includes representatives from NSW DPI, Great Lakes Council, Local Land Services, Office of Environment & Heritage (OEH), Wallis Lake commercial fishers and the Wallis Lake oyster industry.
  - It was confirmed that since 2011, Wallis Lake has been experiencing poor oyster growth with production falling by around 40% by 2015.
  - In early April 2016 Wallis Lake oyster farmers have, in cooperation with NSW DPI, commenced a trial of alternative farming methods at two poorly performing nursery sites. The objective of this trial is to determine if these methods offer a commercially viable alternative to currently used poorly performing post and rail lease infrastructure in these areas.
- 11 The NSW Oyster Industry, through a Steering Committee set up at the NSW Shellfish Committee meeting in May 2014, has initiated a strategic planning study to identify the critical impediments to improved profitability and growth of the NSW Oyster Industry and develop strategic actions to mitigate them. ARAC contributed \$10,000 to the project. ACIL Allen Consulting were contracted for the work and the NSW Oyster Industry Strategy is now complete and includes a vision and 12 strategic priorities to improve the prosperity of the industry. The strategy was presented and discussed at the two Oyster Field Days in late May 2015. An Implementation Group has been created (11 growers with geographically spread representation) to prioritise recommendations and develop milestones to achieve outcomes. The Implementation Group held a workshop on 24 February at the Sydney Fish Markets and developed a series of short, medium and long term actions to address key priorities. These were provided to the broader industry by SMS. The Group will be writing to Shellfish Committee to update them and seek concurrence to move forward on priorities.
- 12 Concerns were raised about logging in the catchment and the runoff into Wonboyn Lake (causing the lake to turn orange in late 2014). An independent soil scientist found this is a rare clay based soil and the sediment does not breakdown. The soil creates major water quality issues after rainfall. Forestry are logging 350 km<sup>2</sup> in that area and Wonboyn Lake is 6 km inland from the sea and so the runoff is not easily dispersed. Anne Loftus is seeking assistance to have forestry/agriculture practices changed. There is also the issue of toxic retardants when Forestry burn off and the run-off into the lake. Professor Sandy Jones from the EPA, local industries and the community has been assisting with this issue.
- 13 ARAC will send an SMS alert to all Aquaculture Permit holders after each meeting indicating 'ARAC has met' with a link to this Summary of Discussions.