



Hunter and Central Coast Sustainable Aquaculture Strategy

Readers' Note

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<http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fisheries/aquaculture/publications/general-management-and-policy/hunter-and-central-coast-sustainable-aquaculture-strategy>

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Overview of the Strategy

Hunter and Central Coast Sustainable Aquaculture
Strategy

Land Based Aquaculture

A NSW Government Initiative

Hunter and Central Coast Sustainable Aquaculture Strategy

A NSW Government initiative of Department of Primary Industries, Department of State and Regional Development, Department of Environment and Conservation, Department of Lands, Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources and NSW Premiers Department to encourage sustainable aquaculture in New South Wales.

Overview of the Strategy

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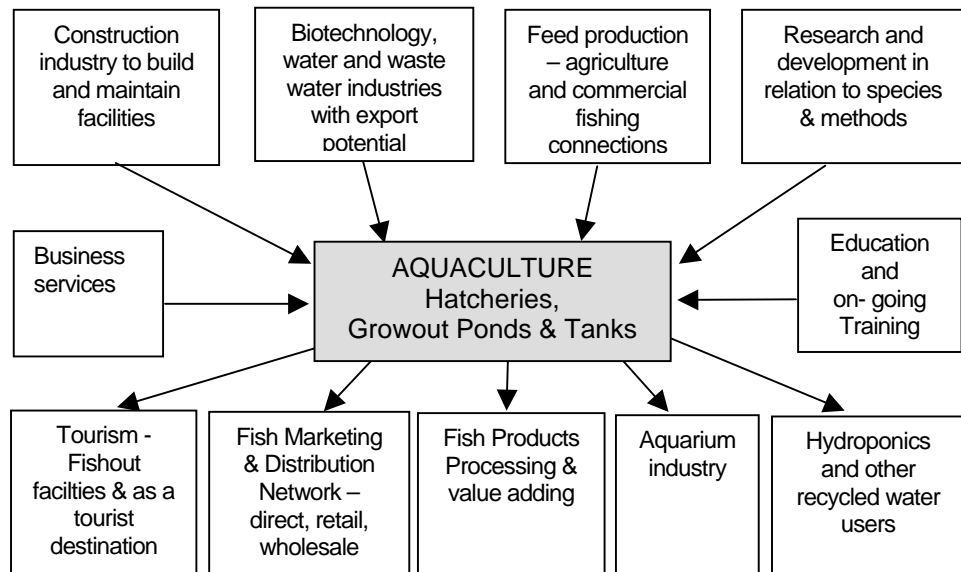
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1 Encouraging Sustainable Aquaculture in NSW

Aquaculture is becoming an increasingly important alternative source of seafood. Throughout the world, demand for seafood is growing, while wild catches are stable or declining. As a result, aquaculture production is increasing in importance as a reliable supply of quality seafood products. The future growth of aquaculture in the NSW depends on its ability to encourage investment and support the development of existing and new aquaculture enterprises that can be competitive in the NSW, Australia and world markets. It is critical that a long-term view is taken to ensure that the investment in aquaculture development is ecologically, economically and socially sustainable in the local and regional environmental context.

Aquaculture has and will continue to play an increasingly important role in generating employment and revenue for this region. Since its beginnings in the early 1980s when there was little expertise in Australia in aquaculture, the industry has matured and grown in experience. The Silver Perch industry in NSW has increased from 10 tonnes in 1991/1992 to 302 tonnes in 2002/03. This will translate into significant regional economic benefits and employment opportunities for the region.

Investment and Employment Opportunities



In addition to the expanding prawn sector, the fresh and saline water aquaculture industry (for example silver perch, barramundi) is increasing steadily in size with added experience and knowledge. In addition to the increasing understanding of pond culture, improvements in recirculation and filtration technology has resulted in an expanding “boutique” tank based industry located in industrial zones in towns supplying high quality fish principally to the restaurant and tourist trade.

The Sustainable Aquaculture Strategy provides a common basis to plan for the future growth of aquaculture in the Region. The outcome of the strategic planning approach will be increased aquaculture opportunities and related employment through:

- facilitating the growth of existing sustainable aquaculture industries;
- attracting new aquaculture industries to the region;
- attracting aquaculture related industries and jobs to the region.

Aquaculture has the potential to be a significant employer in regional areas as well as having flow-on employment and export opportunities.

A partnership has been developed between the aquaculture industry and the local and regional community recognising the natural resource, infrastructure and market opportunities and constraints to facilitate the long-term growth of investment in aquaculture in the region. The Strategy provides a clearly defined framework to facilitate the entry of new aquaculture industries into the region and the continued growth of existing businesses. This strategic framework will provide a competitive advantage for the Region as it provides a tailor-made decision making process and a streamlined approval regime resulting in upfront certainty without compromising environmental outcomes.

2 Overview of the Strategy

The Sustainable Aquaculture Strategy has been developed to provide a focus for facilitating economic development and attracting aquaculture activities to the region. The Strategy provides an environmentally sound framework for interfacing the technical provisions of the Aquaculture Industry Development Plan (AIDP) under the Fisheries Management Act with the land use planning and integrated environmental regulatory provisions under the Environmental Planning and Assessment (EP&A) Act. The Strategy also incorporates ecologically sustainable development principles (ESD) which are dynamic concepts that recognises the need to integrate social and environmental considerations along with short and long-term economic aspects into our decision making processes. This is consistent with the Australian Government's goal for ESD of "*Development that improves the quality of life, both now and in the future, in a way that maintains the ecological processes on which life depends*" (National Strategy for ESD, 1992). This initiative demonstrates leadership in the field. The upfront integration of commercial, infrastructure, environmental and public participation considerations into the process is at the core of this strategic planning initiative.

The Strategy has two components – the Aquaculture Industry Development Plan and the Integrated Approvals provisions.

2.1 Aquaculture Industry Development Plan

The Aquaculture Industry Development Plan provides the best practice environmental management components of the Sustainable Aquaculture Strategy. The AIDP includes the following sections:

- Business Planning;
- Species Selection;
- Site Selection;
- Planning and Design;
- Operating the Farm.

The AIDP incorporates a whole-of-government approach. It relates specifically and only applies to land based aquaculture. It presents a clear message to the existing aquaculture industry as well as new investors as to the environmental performance objectives expected.

The information in the AIDP represents current best practice. However, the strategy encourages continuous improvement in environmental and economic performance and approaches which provide outcomes superior to those outlined in the AIDP are encouraged.

2.2 Integrated Assessment and Approvals

Integrated assessment and approvals are achieved through a combination of the existing and new provisions under the EP&A Act. This assessment and approval framework provides for efficient assessment, appropriate development controls and holistic decision making. This framework complements and implements the AIDP.

The development of best practice in the AIDP for the location and operation of aquaculture enterprises has led to environmental performance criteria that form the basis for “risk” profiles. Based on these profiles, a streamlined approval process for particular types of development has been established in the *State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP) 62 – Sustainable Aquaculture*. The SEPP:-

1. makes aquaculture a permissible use on certain land in the local government areas providing it meets “minimum locational performance criteria”;
2. utilises the best practice in the AIDP to establish risk criteria in a “*Project Profile Analysis*” which can lead to the ranking of development which is considered low risk as Class 1, moderate risk as Class 2 or higher risk as Class 3 Designated Developments. As a result, development which may be currently designated development (and need an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) under Schedule 3 of the EP&A Regulation) may be de-designated. Other development currently not designated may become designated based on criteria specific to the region.

These provisions will ensure that the level of assessment matches the level of impacts of a development proposal. Class 1 and 2 development applications will need to be accompanied by a Statement of Environmental Effects (SEE). Class 3 developments will require an EIS to accompany the development application.

Under the integrated development approvals provisions of the EP&A Act, almost all aquaculture proposals will be considered to be *integrated* development as they will require at least one approval under the following legislation:

Fisheries Management Act 1994, Heritage Act 1977, National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974, Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1998, Rivers and Foreshores Improvement Act 1948, Roads Act 1993, Soil Conservation Act 1938 and Water Act 1912.

In developing the best practice and environmental performance criteria in the AIDP, consideration has been given to the requirements of the above legislation as well as the legislation listed below which may also apply but are not included in these provisions. This will ensure a whole-of-government approach is taken from the outset in establishing sustainable performance and integrated approvals for the environmental management of aquaculture.

Crowns Land Act 1987, Native Vegetation Conservation Act 1997, Native Vegetation Act 2003, National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974, Exhibition of Animals Act 1986.

As the Best Practice in the AIDP includes all key issues for an integrated approval, the obtaining of subsequent approvals should not be onerous. To achieve this objective wherever possible, the development approval will incorporate the general terms of approval relating to all relevant legislation for the establishment of the project.

In addition, the integrated compliance monitoring provisions of the development consent will integrate the requirements of all approval authorities. This will streamline the post-approval monitoring and reporting requirements.

3 Implementation of the Strategy

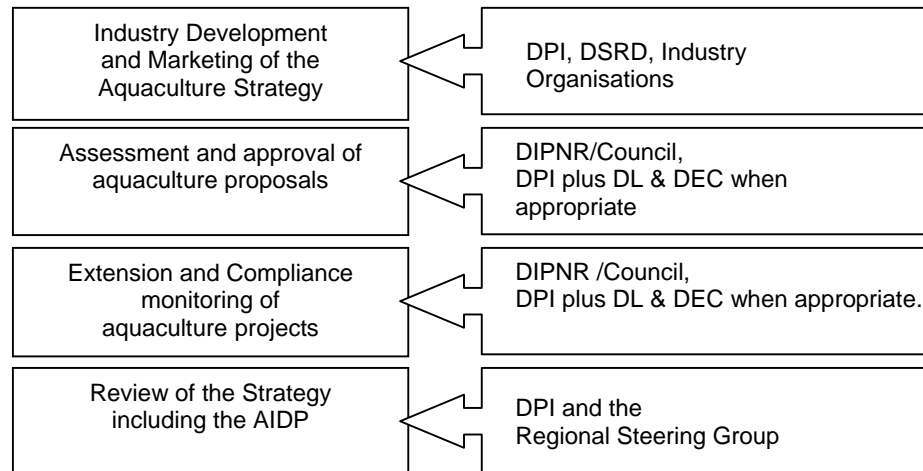
3.1 Putting the Strategy into Action

The implementation of the Sustainable Aquaculture Strategy requires a partnership between government, industry and the community. In order to maximise efficiencies and competitive advantages, interagency and local government co-operation is essential in facilitating sustainable new and expanding aquaculture projects. The application of the Strategy will avoid unnecessary duplication of effort by applicants and agencies. It also will ensure that project approvals can be streamlined when appropriate. This approach offers significant benefits to industry, the community and the environment, the most important being:

- In terms of economic development and employment opportunities, there is clear support for the location of sustainable aquaculture enterprises in the region. This strategic approach has provided a competitive advantage in attracting sustainable employment to the region.
- In terms of development applications, there is more upfront certainty for applicants as to the environmental requirements and criteria to be met. The approach also provides clear incentives to industry to adopt best environmental practice at the outset.
- In terms of environment, consideration of environmental impact at the strategic level offers a more appropriate indication of environmental sustainability relative to individual project impact assessments. The consideration of cumulative impacts at the strategic level addresses shortcomings associated with individual impact assessment in isolation.

Department of Primary Industries (DPI) is the key agency responsible for delivery of the on-the-ground outcomes in these four action areas. The other key player is the consent authority (council or DIPNR) with responsibility for development consent and integrating approvals. Department of Primary Industries and the consent authority will be supported by a Regional Aquaculture Steering Group that will provide technical assistance with regard to legislative requirements, performance standards and monitoring protocols to ensure that a whole-of-government approach is reinforced in each action areas.

The implementation of the strategy has four distinct action areas – industry development, approvals, compliance and review.



Extensive consultation has been undertaken with local government, the aquaculture industry, environmental groups and other stakeholders in the development of the Strategy. This consultative approach will be continued in the implementation, monitoring and review of the Strategy.

3.2 Monitoring and Review of the Strategy

The focus of the strategy is on individual land based aquaculture projects. However, it is recognised that cumulative impacts may occur when a series of aquaculture enterprise developments are established within a catchment or subcatchment. Department of Primary Industries along with other agencies will be responsible for making recommendations to the Regional Steering Group on the need to review and update any aspects of the strategy as a result of cumulative or other changes in the catchment.

Department of Primary Industries will monitor the performance indicators in the AIDP and will trigger a review if those indicators show that cumulative impacts could be occurring. These indicators include a trigger relating to the clustering of prawn farms in estuaries. The Strategy will be reviewed in 5 years or earlier if triggered by the performance indicators.

Department of Primary Industries will report annually in the Department of Primary Industries Annual Report on the implementation of the Strategy. This Report shall include recommendation on the need to update or review the Strategy generally or in relation to particular catchments or sub-regions or particular aspects of environmental performance. This recommendation shall be referred to the Regional Steering Group for action.

4 The Way Forward

The implementation of the Sustainable Aquaculture Strategy requires effective collaboration between government, industry and the community. The Strategy brings together the interests of economic development, land use planning and development control to form a partnership that can lead to sustainable aquaculture and employment generation in the region. The Sustainable Aquaculture Strategy can result in:

- improved environmental outcomes with cumulative issues providing better indicators of sustainability;
- improved development outcomes with greater certainty and a simplified assessment and approval approach;
- improved community outcomes with the development of environmental performance criteria and encouraging employment in the region;
- improved outcomes for the region with co-ordinated assistance in attracting sustainable aquaculture investment.