

NSW Marine Waters Sustainable Aquaculture Strategy

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Why has the NSW Government developed a Marine Waters Sustainable Aquaculture Strategy for NSW?

The NSW Government recognises the need to look at opportunities for sustainable and viable aquaculture development. Aquaculture supports the regional economies of NSW and will be an increasingly important contributor to the future food supply needs of the state.

Aquaculture not only produces quality sustainable seafood, but can be the catalyst for economic development. The flow-on effects of aquaculture have provided increased employment opportunities for service industries, including the tourism, restaurant and retail sectors.

The Marine Waters Sustainable Aquaculture Strategy (Strategy) compliments the successful NSW Land Based Sustainable Aquaculture Strategy and the NSW Oyster Industry Sustainable Aquaculture Strategy.

What is aquaculture?

Aquaculture is the breeding, growing, keeping and harvesting of fish or marine vegetation with a view to sale or for commercial purposes. The definition of fish includes finfish, molluscs, crustaceans and other invertebrates. Types of aquaculture the Strategy considers include sea pens for finfish; longline infrastructure for shellfish and algae; artificial reef for abalone; and ranching on the seafloor (shellfish and other invertebrates).

Why do we need aquaculture?

Aquaculture is one of the fastest-growing industries in the world. In 2012, the volume of farmed seafood overtook beef production. Global demand for seafood is rapidly expanding with world annual per capita fish consumption doubling from about 10 kg in the 1960s to 20 kg in 2016. In 2016, 50% of the seafood consumed worldwide was produced by aquaculture.

The demand for seafood is increasing, however wild caught seafood is not expected to increase from current sustainable catch levels. In order to meet demand, NSW currently imports around 87% of the seafood we purchase. The gap between wild fishery supply and the growing demand for seafood can only be supplied by aquaculture.

Who developed the Strategy?

The Strategy was developed as a whole of government initiative under the guidance of the State Aquaculture Steering Committee. The Committee comprises representatives from the Department of Premier and Cabinet, Department of Planning and Environment, Department of Primary Industries, Environment Protection Authority, Department of Industry (Lands and Water), National Parks and Wildlife Service, Office of Environment and Heritage, Department of Planning and Environment (Resources and Geoscience), NSW Food Authority, Office of Local Government and Transport for NSW (Roads and Maritime Services).

In developing the draft Strategy, a number of key stakeholder groups were contacted to provide comment, including Aboriginal bodies, boating associations, commercial and recreational fishers, aquaculture industry, waterway user groups, universities and environmental non-government organisations. The Strategy was also placed on public exhibition in mid-2018.

Are there other NSW aquaculture strategies?

The NSW Land Based Sustainable Aquaculture Strategy and the NSW Oyster Industry Sustainable Aquaculture Strategy are two other aquaculture strategies that exist. These strategies have greatly assisted in providing certainty to government agencies, proponents and the community that a considered approach is being undertaken in NSW for aquaculture developments. They consider: site and species selection; design and operation; best practice; and water quality protection.

Why do we need an aquaculture strategy for marine waters?

Rather than an ad hoc development approach to marine waters aquaculture, the Strategy provides clear direction on the sustainable development of marine aquaculture. Recent approvals for finfish and shellfish farms in NSW highlight the investment opportunity. A Marine Waters Sustainable Aquaculture Strategy means the NSW Government is on the front foot, ensuring the industry develops sustainably.

Does this Strategy apply to the entire ocean?

The Strategy covers coastal waters to the jurisdictional limit of three nautical miles offshore (state waters), but does not include estuaries.

Will this mean there will be fish farms and other marine aquaculture everywhere within three nautical miles of the coast?

No. Appropriate sites in NSW are limited and there are many areas where the Strategy will exclude marine aquaculture. Operational restrictions will also limit how close aquaculture farms can be situated to each other.

How does the Strategy align with the Marine Estate Management Strategy?

The Strategy is aligned with the Marine Estate Management Strategy (MEMS), which sets the over-arching strategy for the State Government to co-ordinate management of the marine estate.

Marine aquaculture was assessed as part of the MEMS's threat and risk assessment, and was deemed minimal or low risk to the marine assets of the estate.

Have aquaculture sites already been chosen?

No. The Strategy contains guidance on a number of constraints that will require aquaculture farm developers to investigate and then identify the sustainable locations both for aquaculture and the environment.

How will a proposed aquaculture project be assessed under the Strategy?

Aquaculture developments in NSW marine waters will be classified as either State Significant Infrastructure or State Significant Development. This will require a marine waters aquaculture development to obtain approval from the Minister for Planning and Environment under the *Environmental and Planning Assessment Act 1979*. An Environmental Impact Statement will need

to be prepared to accompany any application for approval. Aquaculture developments also need to undergo an assessment under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* administered by the Commonwealth.

Who will oversee compliance of aquaculture farms in marine waters?

The NSW Department of Planning and Environment and the Commonwealth's Department of Environment and Energy regulate marine aquaculture in NSW waters through conditions of approval to operate. Conditions of approval include preparation of management plans, environmental and operational monitoring, reporting requirements and auditing.

How does the Strategy mitigate environmental impact from aquaculture?

The permit application, consultation, environmental impact statement and assessment processes all consider potential impacts on the environment for a particular farming proposal. Removing or minimising environmental impacts is a key operational requirement, and management plans and approval conditions clearly identify these. Ongoing environmental monitoring programs help build a picture of potential impacts and ways in which they may be mitigated into the future.

Will there be any monitoring of the aquaculture farms?

Operators of aquaculture farms will be required to carry out monitoring programs and report on the respective farming activities. The monitoring program will be tailored to the aquaculture type and if significant impacts are found, then remediation actions will be required. Existing fish and mussel farms in NSW are required to monitor water quality and seafloor impacts. This monitoring is undertaken by independent contractors. Much of this is publically available, including video footage under and adjacent to finfish sea pens. Current marine farm operations in NSW have not had a significant impact on the environment.

Will aquaculture infrastructure have an adverse interaction with marine fauna?

Current marine farms in NSW have posed no direct entanglement risk to marine fauna. To prevent adverse interactions with marine fauna, the latest avoidance technologies and designs are required to be deployed.

How will aquaculture infrastructure be marked to make sure it is not a hazard to water safety and navigation, particularly at night?

NSW Roads and Maritime Services require that the extremities of aquaculture leases are marked with appropriate navigational buoys. A Notice to Mariners is issued by RMS and the leases are marked on navigational charts. Navigational buoys are the same as those used for all similar marine navigation applications.

What about pests and diseases?

Only locally-occurring, native species will be approved for culture to ensure the genetic integrity of a region is maintained. There will be a requirement for all farms to develop biosecurity plans to address pests and diseases and routine health monitoring of stock.

Will I be able to access the aquaculture lease areas for fishing and diving?

Given the presence of submerged buoys, nets and mooring lines, recreational boaters, fishers, spear fishers and divers should remain outside the lease areas for their own safety. Lease areas

will be delineated by navigational markers. It is an offence to interfere with or damage anything in lease areas.

Will you be able to see aquaculture infrastructure from the shoreline?

A number of design features will be used to minimise visibility of infrastructure, including the use of dark coloured materials, minimising and streamlining surface infrastructure, maximising subsurface infrastructure and maintaining a low profile. Service vessels will also be very similar to existing commercial and recreational vessels that frequently navigate marine waters.

Aquaculture in a marine park

Marine parks are zoned for multiple use such as recreation, fishing and tourism. NSW marine parks host approximately half of the leases issued for aquaculture in the state.

What will happen to aquaculture infrastructure if commercial activities cease?

It is a condition of an aquaculture permit that all infrastructure is removed from the lease area/s if operations are expired, cancelled or surrendered. Aquaculture lessees in NSW are also required to contribute to an Aquaculture Lease Security Bond. The Aquaculture Lease Security Bond held by the government can be used to clean up infrastructure if required.

For further information

Visit: <https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fishing/aquaculture>

Contact: aquaculture.management@dpi.nsw.gov.au

Or call an Aquaculture Management Officer on 02 4982 1232