

Department of Primary Industries
and Fisheries

Aquaculture policy

Policy relating to the relaying of oysters
within Queensland waters

FAMOP005

Version 1

Dec 2003

Contents

1.0	Title.....	3
2.0	Effective date.....	3
3.0	Introduction.....	3
4.0	Policy and objectives.....	4
5.0	Application of the policy.....	4
6.0	Policy considerations.....	4
7.0	Glossary.....	5
8.0	The Policy.....	7
9.0	Policy amendments.....	8

1.0 Title

This Policy is to be referred to as “The Policy relating to the Relaying of Oysters within Queensland Waters”.

2.0 Effective date

The policy is effective from 20 May 2003.

3.0 Introduction

The Queensland Shellfish Water Assurance Monitoring Program (QSWAMP) commenced in November 1993 and is administered by the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries, (DPI&F). QSWAMP surveyed and classified three major oyster growing areas of Moreton Bay, namely Mud Island, Moreton Island and North Stradbroke Island in 1997. Pumicestone Passage and the Pimpama River were classified in 2002. In addition, the North Stradbroke Island classification was reviewed in 2002. The Mud Island growing area is now closed as it is considered unsuitable for this activity to continue due to the areas close proximity to the Luggage Point Water Reclamation facility. The classification of these growing areas is in a manner consistent with the guidelines provided in the Australian Shellfish Quality Assurance Program (ASQAP) Operations Manual.

In Queensland, oysters grow in a range of marine and estuarine environments and are commercially harvested from licensed aquaculture areas. The water quality of these oyster growing areas varies in accordance with the level and type of pollution sources in that area.

Oysters grown in areas classified as restricted, conditionally restricted in the open status, or Conditionally Approved areas in the closed status, may only be harvested for human consumption if they are first subjected to a natural depuration process (relaying). The QSWAMP facilitates this natural depuration requirement by allowing the relaying of these oysters from polluted to approved areas. Relayed oysters must be held in the approved growing area for sufficient time and in adequate conditions to allow cleansing to occur. Relaying can only occur in areas where a comprehensive sanitary survey has been completed and the growing area classified in accordance with the guidelines provided in the ASQAP Operations Manual.

Stringent controls are required to ensure that relay procedures are adequate to protect public health. Oysters are only permitted to be moved from the restricted or conditionally restricted growing areas whilst they are in the open status. Oysters may also be relayed from conditionally approved areas whilst they are closed, subject to certain conditions. Relayed oysters must be held in the approved growing area for sufficient time and in adequate conditions to allow natural depuration to occur. The minimum period for relaying as stipulated in the ASQAP Operations Manual is 14 days. Relaying is not appropriate when oysters are known to be contaminated with deleterious substances that would not be effectively purged from the oyster during the purification process.

Ongrowing is the process whereby oysters are relayed from an unclassified area to an approved classified area for a sufficient period to permit their development as a marketable product. The minimum period for ongrowing as stipulated in the ASQAP Operations Manual is 60 days.

This Policy is the requirements for relaying within Queensland waters only. The transshipment of shellstock from interstate is considered in the “Policy Relating to the Transshipment of Oysters into Queensland Waters”

4.0 Policy and objectives

Objective: To minimise the potential impacts of food safety and disease from the relaying of oysters within Queensland waters.

This Policy will allow the relaying of oysters from Restricted, Conditionally Restricted harvest areas in the open status, or Conditionally Approved areas in the closed status and relocated into Approved or Conditionally Approved areas in the open status. This will reduce public health issues and disease translocation by ensuring oysters are relayed for sufficient time and in adequate conditions to allow cleansing to occur.

5.0 Application of the policy

This policy applies to holders of aquaculture licences for oysters in Queensland and is to read and applied in conjunction with the Fisheries Act 1994, its associated Regulations, all other relevant policies of the DPI&F and the National Competition Policy.

6.0 Policy considerations

The main purpose of the Fisheries Act 1994 (the Act) (Section 3) is to provide for the use, conservation and enhancement of the community’s fisheries resources and fish habitats in a way that seeks to:

- a. apply and balance the principles of ecological sustainable development;
- and
- b. promote ecological sustainable development.

In balancing the principles, each principle is to be given the relative emphasis appropriate in the circumstances (Section 3(2)).

The objective of this Policy is to minimise potential impacts of food safety and disease translocation. There is a need to ensure the aquaculture oyster industry enjoys a reputation as producing a safe food for human consumption. This will improve the total quality of life, both now and in the future. This is consistent with the following principles of ecological sustainable development:

- a. considering the need to develop a strong, growing and diversified economy that can enhance the capacity for environmental protections;

- b. enhancing individual and community wellbeing through economic development that safeguards the wellbeing of future generations; and
- c. in making decisions, effectively integrating fairness and short and long-term economic, environmental impacts of actions and policies.

Section 61 of the Fisheries Act 1994 (the Act) allows the chief executive, or a person holding the requisite delegation, to impose any “reasonable and relevant” condition on an authority. Such a condition can have the effect of preventing the authority taking fisheries resources or using apparatus that could otherwise be lawfully used under it (Section 61(7)).

The relaying policy and procedures outlined in this document are consistent with the requirements of the ASQAP. The ASQAP was established on the National Shellfish Sanitation Program of the United States of America. ASQAP provides the administrative and procedural framework, in the form of the ASQAP Operations Manual, as guidelines as these apply under Federal and State legislation for the control of shellfish growing areas, harvesting, processing and the distribution of shellfish. The Manual contains classification criteria that must be applied to each sample site within the oyster growing areas. These classifications, Approved, Conditionally Approved, Restricted, Conditionally Restricted and Prohibited, all reflect the sanitary status of the growing area to which the classification is assigned.

The ASQAP Operations Manual’s main objective is to protect the health of shellfish consumers through the administration and application of procedures that:

- monitor and determine the risk of shellfish contamination by pathogenic bacteria and viruses, biotoxins and chemicals that may impact the growing areas;
- impose appropriate harvesting controls; and
- ensure protection from contamination after harvesting prior to the retail chain.

7.0 Glossary

In this policy statement the terms listed below have the following meaning:

“Approved harvesting area”

A shellfish harvesting area classified as approved by the SSCA for harvesting or collecting shellfish for direct marketing.

“Closed Status”

Means a condition that may apply to a harvesting area where the commercial harvesting of shellfish is temporarily prohibited. A closed status may be placed on any of four classified harvesting area categories: approved, conditional approved, restricted or conditional restricted.

“Conditional approved area”

The classification of a shellfish harvesting area which meets approved harvesting area criteria as determined by the SSCA, for a predictable period. The period depends upon established performance standards specified in a management plan. A conditional approved area is closed by the SSCA when the area does not meet the approved harvesting area criteria.

“Conditional restricted area”

The classification of a shellfish harvesting area that meets restricted area criteria as determined by the SSCA, for a predictable period. The period depends upon acceptable performance standards specified in a management plan. A conditional restricted harvesting area is closed by the SSCA when the area does not meet the restricted harvesting area criteria.

“Ongrowing”

The process whereby shellfish are translocated to a classified area for a sufficient period to permit their development as a marketable product. The period shall not be less than 60 days.

“Open status”

In respect to a conditional approved harvesting area, means that shellfish may be harvested for direct marketing when the shellfish are safe for human consumption as determined by the SSCA.

In respect to a conditional restricted harvesting area, means that shellfish may be harvested for depuration or relaying when the shellfish growing waters and the shellfish meet harvesting criteria as determined by the SSCA.

"Relaying"

The transfer of shellfish from restricted areas, conditional restricted areas in the open status, or conditional approved areas in the closed status to approved or conditional approved areas in the open status for the reduction of pathogens as measured by the faecal coliform indicator group or poisonous or deleterious substances that may be present, by using the ambient environment as a treatment process.

“Restricted area”

A growing area classified by the SSCA as an area from which shellfish may be harvested only with the approval of the SSCA and then subjected to an effective purification process such as relaying or depuration.

“Shellfish"

All edible species of molluscan bivalves

"Shellstock"

Live shellfish in the shell.

“State Shellfish Control Authority (SSCA)”

The State government agency or agencies having the legal authority to classify shellfish growing areas, control the relaying, harvesting, depuration and handling of shellstock and to seize shellstock that is contaminated or has been harvested from prohibited or closed shellfish harvesting areas.

8.0 The Policy

The Chief Executive will ordinarily impose the following conditions for oyster aquaculture licences in relation to the transferring of oysters for the purpose of natural depuration.

OT 1 Where rock oysters *Saccostrea glomerata* are to be transferred to an oyster area for natural depuration, the holder must:

- a) relay oysters to an Oyster Area which is only classified as **Approved** or **Conditionally Approved** and in the **open status**; and
 - b) not relay oysters from **Restricted** or **Conditionally Restricted** areas which are in the **closed status**; and
 - c) notify the Aquaculture Policy Section, DPI&F in writing at least two (2) days prior to each transfer of oysters. This advice must be written and include the following information:
 - the date and time of the movement of oysters from the oyster area;
 - the number and species of oysters to be relocated;
 - the destination of the relocated oysters including oyster area number and licence holder;
 - the mode of transport utilised for the relocation; and
 - d) maintain written records of the above information for a period of at least 12 months; and
- 2 The Chief Executive will ordinarily impose the following conditions for oyster aquaculture licences in relation to the receiving of oysters for the purpose of natural depuration.

OR 1 Where rock oysters *Saccostrea glomerata* are to be received from an oyster area for natural depuration, the holder must:

- a) not receive any oysters from **Restricted** or **Conditionally Restricted** areas which are in the **closed status**; and
- b) notify the Aquaculture Policy Section, Queensland Fisheries Service within 24 hours of the receipt of oysters from an area classified as **Conditionally Approved** in the **closed status**, **Restricted**, **Conditionally Restricted** or **Unclassified**; and
- c) hold each consignment of oysters from areas classified as **Restricted**, **Conditionally Restricted** or **Conditionally Approved** in the **closed status** for a minimum period of fourteen (14) consecutive days in an **Approved** or **Conditionally Approved** area in the **open status** prior to harvesting for human consumption; and
- d) hold each consignment of oysters from areas which are **unclassified** for a minimum period of sixty (60) consecutive days prior to harvesting for human consumption. The last fourteen (14) consecutive days must be in an **Approved** or **Conditionally Approved** area in the **open status**.

- e) place relayed oysters on a rack or longline whose sole function is the depuration of relayed oysters. This rack or longline must be readily identifiable from others on the oyster area and separated from other racks or longlines; and
- f) keep each consignment of relayed oysters separate and identifiable; and
- g) individually label with an identifying tag each consignment of oysters; and
- h) maintain records which details where the stock was sourced from, number of bags placed, date and time of placement, exact position on the approved aquaculture area, method of holding oysters, identification mark of each batch of oysters, date of harvest and destination of oysters on harvest; and
- i) maintain markings during the entire duration the oysters are in the water; and
- j) maintain records for an additional calendar year from the date of harvest.

9.0 Policy amendments

This policy document was revised in January 2005 solely to reflect the departmental name change to the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries.