



Mid West Aquaculture Development Zone

Open for business

The Mid West Aquaculture Development Zone is located across an area of open water between Geraldton and the southern region of the Abrolhos Islands group.

The 3,000 hectare zone is comprised of two parts, a northern area of 2,200 hectares and a southern area of 800 hectares.

The southern area of the zone is subject to an existing aquaculture licence.

Aquaculture development zones provide 'investment-ready' platforms for setting up large-scale commercial aquaculture operations – or fish farms. The Government has done all the work up front to ensure that projects in the zone have an environmental seal of approval. This means investors can now secure environmental approval in a few months, rather than a few years, potentially saving more than \$500,000 in costs.

Exhaustive site selection processes have determined that the Abrolhos Islands with its deep, well mixed waters and large areas of sandy benthic environment is a suitable location for a finfish aquaculture industry to develop.

The zone's location, nearby the City of Geraldton, provides aquaculture operators with ready access to support infrastructure, downstream processing services and regular road and air freight services, which provide value-added services to the industry.

Aquaculture
is the world's
fastest growing food
production sector

Environmental and technical studies, expert advice and ecosystem modelling have helped determine the capacity of the environment to support aquaculture and enabled appropriate management strategies to be developed.

The Environmental Protection Authority has assessed the strategic proposal and determined the zone will not put its environmental objectives at risk.

The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) will manage operations in the zone on behalf of the Minister for Fisheries.

The zone will be managed through an integrated management framework, including the *Fish Resources Management Act 1994*, the Environmental Management and Monitoring Plan and the Marine Fauna Interaction Management Plan.

Vision for development

Aquaculture production systems in the zone will be in the form of conventional floating sea-cages, which use circular flotation rings to support nets that contain the fish being cultured. They also include robust external nets to exclude predators and minimise the risk of any adverse impacts on marine mammals, such as sea lions.

These systems are usually set within a grid pattern and anchored to the seabed.



Development proposals will support the culturing of any species of marine finfish that occur naturally within the Mid West region. The most likely species to be cultured initially is yellowtail kingfish (*Seriola lalandi*).

Up to
1,400
jobs forecast over
10 years

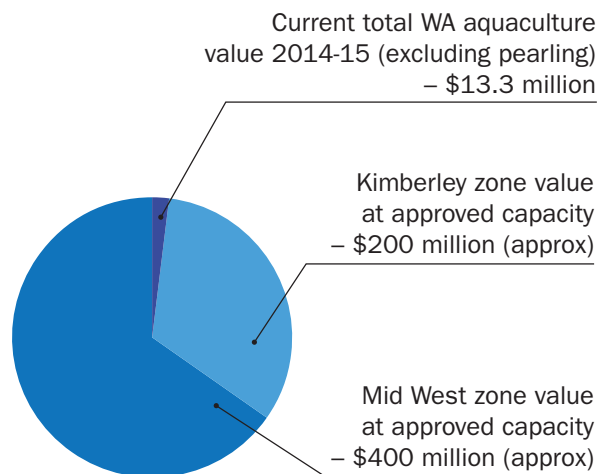
Industry growth prospects

Aquaculture is an emerging industry that offers great potential for regional Western Australia.

The WA aquaculture industry, excluding pearling, generates \$15 million in economic value annually. Subject to the aquaculture zones in the Mid West and Kimberley regions producing at or near capacity and other sectors growing to meet expectations, this figure is forecast to grow to over \$600 million within the next decade.

The intent for the Mid West region is to obtain the optimum use of the available zone area, which will be shaped by a number of factors including the number, size and location of leases which will be established within the zones, as well as lease site separation and appropriate biosecurity measures.

The total allowable annual production of finfish inside the zone is set to an environmentally-acceptable maximum biomass (that is, the total weight of fish in the water) of 24,000 tonnes, which for a species such as yellowtail kingfish, is equivalent to an annual production or yield of 48,000 tonnes. This equates to an economic value of approximately \$400 million.



Frequently asked questions

1. When will prospective aquaculture operators be able to take up a lease in the zone?

Declaration of the zone on 15 September is the first essential step. Following the declaration, on Monday 18 September, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) will then invite applications for licences and leases in the Mid West Zone. DPIRD will begin considering applications after eight weeks, on Friday 10 November. Decisions will be made as soon as practicable after that date in accordance with the process set out in the Zone Allocation Policy. All the relevant information will be available at www.fish.wa.gov.au/aquaculture

2. Will the zone be marked?

The on-water boundary of the zone will not be marked as passage within the zone is non-exclusive, that is, not restricted to aquaculture operators. However, the Department of Transport will require sea-cages to be marked with lights and signs to aid navigation.

3. I'm a commercial fisher – how will the zone affect me?

For most activities it is unlikely that commercial fishing will be significantly impeded. You will be able to fish inside the zone providing you fish outside of the sea-cages and do not interfere with aquaculture gear, including markers and anchors, or aquaculture stock. The sea-cages will take up less than five per cent of the surface area of the zone. Some forms of fishing may be incompatible with the aquaculture requirements for the zone. If you feel you may be affected please contact DPIRD to discuss your concerns.

4. I'm a recreational fisher – how will the zone affect me?

It is unlikely that recreational fishing will be affected. You will be able to fish inside the zone providing you do not disturb or interfere with aquaculture gear or aquaculture stock. The sea-cages will take up less than five per cent of the surface area of the zone.

5. I'm a traditional owner in this area – how will the zone affect me?

It is unlikely that you will be affected. You will be able to continue to conduct traditional activities, including fishing and hunting inside the zone, providing you do not disturb or interfere with aquaculture gear or aquaculture stock. There

are also potential opportunities for indigenous people to be involved in the zone, including in the areas of employment and training.

6. I'm in the tourism business – how will the zone affect me?

The establishment of the zone won't affect your access to this area, or your activities inside or outside the zone. In fact, the zone is likely to increase tourism opportunities by providing additional features of interest.

7. How will the environmental values of the Abrolhos Islands be protected?

Environmental and technical studies, expert advice and ecosystem modelling have helped determine the capacity of the environment and enabled appropriate management strategies to be developed. The Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) has assessed the strategic proposal and determined that the zone will not put its environmental objectives at risk.

8. Why do we establish aquaculture zones?

The Western Australian Government is committed to the development of a sustainable marine aquaculture industry. Establishing aquaculture development zones for marine finfish will provide opportunities for existing aquaculture operations to expand and new aquaculture operations to be created in Western Australia. This will provide significant economic benefits to the local community through job creation opportunities and regional economic diversification.

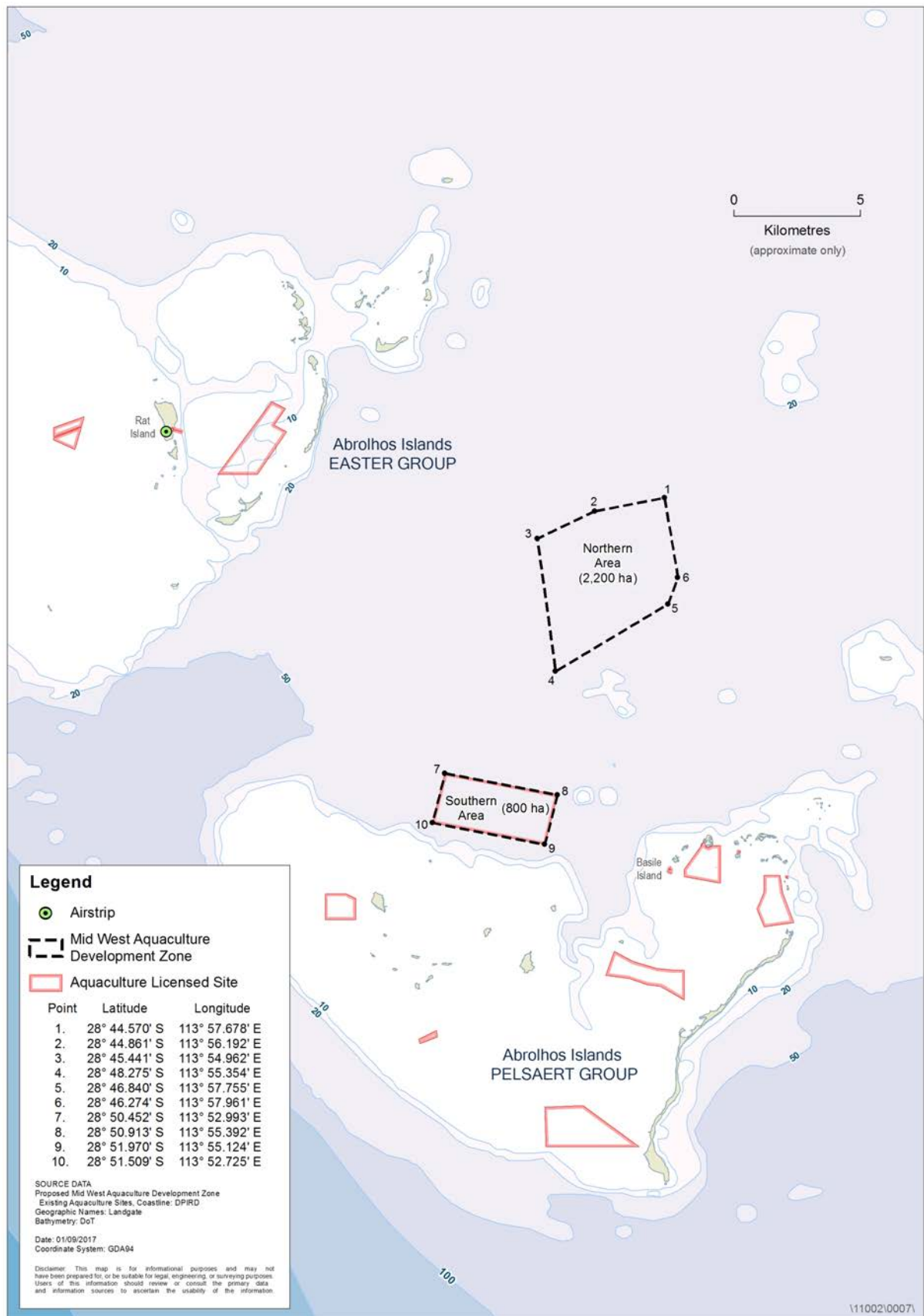
9. Why do we need to declare these zones?

Declared aquaculture development zones streamline the approvals processes for commercial aquaculture projects within the zoned areas and provide an 'investment ready' platform for prospective local and international investors.

10. What difference does the approval of the strategic environmental assessment make?

A strategic environmental assessment examines the cumulative environmental impact of large-scale projects and supports sustainable development. The assessment is conducted by the EPA. It is designed to ensure all environmental concerns, including potential cumulative effects of multiple operations in the location, are considered and incorporated in environmental management plans.

Mid West aquaculture zone



Further information

More information on aquaculture in Western Australia please visit www.fish.wa.gov.au/aquaculture or email aquaculture@dpird.wa.gov.au