

Aquaculture and Pearl Production

General Overview

The State's commercial aquaculture industry continued to be dominated by South Sea pearl production in the north, algae production for beta carotene on the west coast and freshwater crayfish and mussels in the south. Development increased for species such as non-maxima pearl oysters, edible oysters and abalone.

PEARLING ACTIVITIES

The culture of pearl oysters of the species *Pinctada maxima* has been a major success. Centred on Broome, the pearling industry has operated since the 1880s, initially as a source of mother-of-pearl and more recently as Australia's largest and most successful aquaculture sector, producing quality South Sea pearls. The industry has continued to develop with a sound management base, with farms operating from Exmouth Gulf through to the Northern Territory border. Live shell is also traditionally used to stock farms in the Northern Territory.

OTHER AQUACULTURE ACTIVITIES

The level of activity and interest in aquaculture continued, with a diverse range of aquaculture enterprises operating throughout Western Australia. These included the production of algae for beta carotene, mussels, yabbies, marron and trout. Development work and commercial production continued for marine finfish, abalone, edible oysters, pearl oysters of the species *Pinctada albina* and *Pinctada margaritifera*, barramundi and trochus. The State's first prawn farm was licensed at a site in Exmouth Gulf. Following health and quarantine clearances, a large number of juvenile redclaw of a superior genetic strain were brought into Western Australia for aquaculture purposes.

AQUACULTURE DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

During 1994, the Minister for Fisheries announced an aquaculture development initiative, supported by funding of \$4.5 million over three years. Financial support for the initiative was subsequently extended with a further \$8 million for the years 1997/98 to 2000/01.

During 1998/99, the agency continued to implement this initiative. Key activities included the completion of aquaculture infrastructure in Albany and Pemberton and the preparation of draft aquaculture plans for key

regions such as Exmouth Gulf, Shark Bay, the Abrolhos Islands and the Recherche Archipelago. There were also significant resources committed to the assessment of licence applications in accordance with Ministerial Policy Guideline No. 8, 'Assessment of applications for authorisations for Aquaculture and Pearling in coastal waters of Western Australia', and the development of policy for species such as non-maxima pearl oysters and abalone and matters relating to translocation, performance criteria and access to broodstock. Marron farming regulations were also reviewed with the aim of simplifying the licensing framework.

A major strategy for aquaculture development in the Kimberley was released during the year. The strategy included development of an investment attraction package and preparation of environmental assessment documentation for development at Lake Argyle.

The agency maintained strong linkages with peak industry bodies and the relevant management advisory committees. Twelve aquaculture development projects were funded through the Aquaculture Development Fund during 1998/99, worth in excess of \$150,000.

MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS

- Continued implementation of the Government aquaculture development strategy.
- Completion of the Great Southern Aquaculture Park in Albany.
- Completion of the South West Freshwater Research and Aquaculture Centre in Pemberton.
- Approximately 50 pearling and aquaculture applications assessed to date in accordance with Ministerial Policy Guideline No. 8, 'Assessment of applications for authorisations for Aquaculture and Pearling in coastal waters in Western Australia'.
- Release of a major strategy for aquaculture development in the Kimberley.
- Marron farming regulations reviewed.
- Commencement of drafting for a new Pearling Act.
- Participation in the review of pearling legislation under National Competition Policy agreements.