

Aquaculture (Zones – Eastern Spencer Gulf) Amendment Policy 2021

Summary of Public Consultation Submissions and Responses

2021



Government
of South Australia
Department of Primary
Industries and Regions

Aquaculture (Zones – Eastern Spencer Gulf) Amendment Policy

2021: Summary of Public Consultation Submissions and Responses

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All Enquiries

Fisheries and Aquaculture Division
Department of Primary Industries and Regions
2 Hamra Ave WEST BEACH SA
GPO Box 1671, Adelaide SA 5001
T 08 8429 0501
E lauren.holmes@sa.gov.au

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Public Consultation Process

In 2020, the Department of Primary Industries and Regions (PIRSA) Fisheries and Aquaculture Division undertook a targeted review of the *Aquaculture (Zones – Eastern Spencer Gulf) Policy 2005* (Zone Policy) to consider adding algae as a permitted species within the three aquaculture zones located in Hardwicke Bay. The targeted review was initiated following expression of interest by the Narungga Nation Aboriginal Corporation to undertake algae aquaculture within these aquaculture zones.

Minor amendments to the Zone Policy were then proposed through the draft Aquaculture (Zones – Eastern Spencer Gulf) Amendment Policy 2021 (draft Policy) and a supporting draft Policy Report. These documents were released for a mandated two month public consultation period (between August to October 2020) as per section 12 of the *Aquaculture Act 2001* (the Aquaculture Act) to obtain feedback. Calls for submissions were advertised on the PIRSA website, the Advertiser, the Yorke Peninsula Country Times and Koori Mail, social media avenues, and to targeted stakeholders.

This document describes the submissions that were provided in response to the draft Policy and supporting draft Policy Report and any consequential amendments that were then made to the finalised versions. By providing objective and balanced information, PIRSA seeks to inform all stakeholders – government, industry and community – about aquaculture in South Australia.

Positive Feedback

A total of 10 submissions were received from the public consultation process. The majority of submissions (9 of the 10 submissions) were positive, strongly supporting the inclusion of algae and growth of the aquaculture industry, stimulation of local employment and tourism in the region, and aiding in the potential to produce ruminants (e.g. cattle) which emit lower greenhouse gases (i.e. methane) when fed certain types of algae (i.e. *Asparagopsis spp.*).

Response to Concerns

One submission received during the public consultation highlighted concerns that the farming of seaweed will impact the surrounding ecosystem.

The aquaculture industry is tightly regulated through the Aquaculture Act and other aquaculture legislative instruments, including the *Aquaculture Regulations 2016* and conditions of aquaculture leases and corresponding licences, to ensure development is ecologically sustainable and environmental impacts are minimised.

The three objects of the Aquaculture Act include:

- (a) to promote ecologically sustainable development of marine and inland aquaculture; and

- (b) to maximise benefits to the community from the State's aquaculture resources; and
- (c) otherwise to ensure the efficient and effective regulation of the aquaculture industry.

Once an aquaculture zone policy has been finalised, pursuant to the Aquaculture Act there is a separate process required to grant an aquaculture lease and corresponding licence within an aquaculture zone. The tenure or leasable hectares are first released through a public call for applications within a specified time period by the Minister for Primary Industries and Regional Development (the Minister), which then undergo a competitive assessment process for tenure allocation by the independent Aquaculture Tenure Allocation Board (ATAB). Recommendations from the ATAB are then provided to the Minister, with successful applications as determined by the Minister invited to submit a full licence application to PIRSA (note no aquaculture lease and licence has been granted at this stage).

A licence application is then assessed in line with PIRSA Fisheries and Aquaculture's Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD) risk assessment guidelines for aquaculture licences based on the National ESD Framework: The 'how to' Guide for Aquaculture (*Fletcher et al.*, 2004). The thorough assessment process considers risks, including risks to the surrounding ecosystem, of the aquaculture activity at a site level (both marine and land-based) through to accumulative risks of the industry at the regional scale. Using these guidelines, aquaculture licence applications are assessed to determine the likely environmental, social and economic risks the proposed licence may have if approved. Whether a particular species is permitted in a specific location will depend on the environmental characteristics of the location. Should a risk event be deemed too high, the Aquaculture Act provides that additional licence conditions can be imposed to mitigate risks to an acceptable level. Further, prior to the Minister granting an aquaculture licence, pursuant to the Aquaculture Act the licence application, including PIRSA's ESD risk assessment report, must be referred to the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) for their consideration and approval.

Monitoring of environmental performance through PIRSA's Environmental Monitoring Program (EMP) prescribed in the *Aquaculture Regulations 2016* (the Regulations) allows for adaptive management of sites. EMP requirements are sector based and can be tailored through the lease and licence assessment process, if required, to minimise the risks posed by the aquaculture activity occurring on the site. These environmental monitoring provisions under the Regulations, which includes both annual and additional periodic monitoring are considered sufficient to monitor and adaptively manage any potential risks to the ecosystem.

Regulation 18 of the Regulations requires a licensee to ensure activities under the licence conform to an aquaculture strategy (individual aquaculture strategy or sector-based strategy). An aquaculture strategy must specify the strategies which are to apply to the licensee (or class of licensees) in the course of aquaculture carried on under the licence including but not limited to strategies for maintaining farming structures and other aquaculture equipment, avoiding or minimising disease, escape of aquaculture stock and marine vertebrate interactions, and a plan for responding to these events if they occur.

In conclusion, the South Australian aquaculture legislative framework, including but not limited to the *Aquaculture Act 2001*, *Aquaculture Regulations 2016* and the *Fisheries Management Act 2007* (and associated regulations), provide for a set of common farm management principles which aim to ensure aquaculture development meets the principles of ecologically sustainable development.

We acknowledge that the farming of algae is a relatively new industry and there are unknowns, however adaptive and conservative management through the legislation and the process outlined above will mitigate risks. For further information on Seaweed farming, an Australian Seaweed Blueprint for Growth was released in September 2020:

<https://www.agrifutures.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/20-072.pdf>

Amendments to Policy and Policy Report

Following consideration of all submissions received during the public consultation process, no further amendments were made to the draft Policy and supporting Policy Report. This was primarily due to the following:

- The proposed amendments were considered minor in nature;
- Algae is already a prescribed species for aquaculture in all other aquaculture zones contained within the Zone Policy;
- The majority of submissions received (9 out of 10 submissions) were positive and supported the proposed amendments; and
- The risks raised in submissions (1 out of 10 submissions) were considered acceptable as they can be mitigated through the current regulatory framework.

The *Aquaculture (Zones – Eastern Spencer Gulf) Amendment Policy 2021* and supporting Policy Report was subsequently approved by the Minister and came into operation on 11 May 2021. Copies of the finalised documents can be viewed on PIRSA Fisheries and Aquaculture website at

https://www.pir.sa.gov.au/aquaculture/policy_and_legislation_for_aquaculture/zone_policies