



NSW DPI Oyster Industry Update – Fire Impacts

January 2020

DPI met with the oyster industry on 7th January to discuss short and long term assistance required as a result of fires across NSW.

This update adds to information provided to industry via SMS on 10th January 2020.

Available Assistance:

See <https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fishing/aquaculture/natural-disaster-assistance>

The Commonwealth has announced further business assistance grants. For details see <https://www.pmc.gov.au/domestic-policy/national-bushfire-recovery-agency>

DPI is working with the Food Authority, NSW Oyster Extension Officer and NSW Farmers Association to progress actions arising from the 7th January industry meeting and other forums.

The King Highway is now open for transport of oysters to Canberra southwards. The Princess Highway remains closed from Eden into Victoria.

Wonboyn Lake residents received much needed assistance late last week.

The Food Authority has approved a plan to increase the level of phytoplankton testing to weekly and will cover the analysis costs of south coast phytoplankton testing for the next six weeks. Extra monitoring will also be covered across NSW for exceptional rainfall events.

DPI is assessing each catchment for impact and is working with the EPA. This will assist in prioritising on-ground actions. DPI met with EPA on 15th January to coordinate water quality monitoring on the south coast. The EPA sampled the tidally closed Wonboyn Lake on 16th January. They are working with the Food Authority and DPI to characterise ash input to better understand the impact on oysters, also the potential for algal blooms.

The Food Authority responded to reported poor water quality in Eurobodalla Shire. Clyde and Tuross are open for harvest and one harvest area in Wagonga is closed to harvest.

The Tasmanian oyster industry has offered to send two growers to affected areas and share their fire experiences. DPI will work with the NSW Oyster Extension Officer and NSW Farmers to support this initiative.

Getting approval to clear fuel build up on Crown Land oyster depot leases at Merimbula has been raised with agencies and will be followed up at Shellfish Committee. Vegetation in Barlows Bay in close proximity to oyster sheds has been raised with Council.

Potential marketing impacts were discussed with oyster marketers and oyster processors on 15th January. Actions arising include: DPI to advise industry that oyster demand is still very strong in Sydney; media messages to make a very clear statement about the quality and safety of oysters in the market place; industry request for prompt payment for oyster sales to support cashflow; DPI to contact Destination NSW about up-coming oyster festivals in NSW and investigate social media promotional platforms, Sydney Fish Market to promote oysters at a Chinese New Year event; and DPI to raise again with industry the risks associated with coming rainfall. In the longer term: DPI to raise sharing national production data with Oysters Australia; brand awareness to be discussed at Shellfish Committee and an event calendar to be generated. Export was discussed but is not a primary focus at present.

Blazeaid (volunteer organisation) can provide additional manpower to oyster farmers providing the work is “feet on the ground”. Blazeaid are present on the south coast and work through Blazeaid Coordinators in the local disaster centre.

DPI has contacted Councils, Crown Lands and Environment, Energy and Science in regards to tidal sand bar opening strategies and approvals required for Wonboyn, Old Bar (Manning), and Tuross. DPI met with Bega Council on 16th January to discuss oyster industry impacts and to prioritise the requirements for the opening of the entrance of Wonboyn Lake.

Sediment impact from works in the catchment (eg fire trails) has been raised in a number of disaster management forums. The immediate focus is on protecting water supply dams.

Support for waste levy exemption or other incentives for waste disposal to help industry to have been sought from the EPA. The NSW Oyster Extension Officer is following up an initiative with the Commonwealth to also attract funds in this area.

Industry across the state and DPI are concerned about the potential impacts of rainfall runoff in the next 12-18 months as a result of the fires. DPI are working on a response plan including hatchery and nurse capacity to support future spat supply.

Three south coast oyster industry representatives took part in a DPI meeting with commercial fishers on 14 January to discuss assistance matters for the seafood industry. Issues raised included: DPI’s assessment of short and long term impacts on sectors and the environment; NSW Seafood Industry Council work to support seafood promotion; reducing red tape for applicants for assistance; coordination between state and commonwealth agencies; lack of cash flow; rainfall and water quality impacts; assessment of catchments; and merits of attracting tourism to affected areas in the short term.

More Information:

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

02 4916 3919 or contact aquaculture.administration@dpi.nsw.gov.au

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