

Australian Aquaculture Code of Conduct

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The Code of Conduct and why it is needed

With a clean environment and freedom from many of the major diseases experienced in the northern hemisphere, Australian aquaculturists have a strong competitive marketing advantage. Our 'clean and green' image has allowed many of our aquaculture products to command premium prices.

Clean water also means faster growing and healthier fish. Hence, environmental protection is a major priority for the industry, as it relies on the provision of clean waters for its livelihood. Poor site selection, insufficient capital investment, deficient farm design, inadequate public administration, or inappropriate management may mean that some aquaculture operations cause environmental change. Through the peak national body, the Australian Aquaculture Forum the industry is committed to implementing farming practices based on ecologically sustainable development principles. Recognition of the need for aquaculture to play a major role in protecting the marine, estuarine and freshwaters of Australia led to the development of this Code of Conduct.

The Code of Conduct evolved out of a 15-month consultation process involving more than 350 representatives from industry, government, environmental interest groups, Aboriginal groups and other stakeholders with a commitment to the sustainable management of Australia's aquatic environment.

This Code is voluntary, except in so far as parts of the Code may have been given, or may be given, binding legal effect by means of legislation. On behalf of the wider Australian aquaculture industry, the Australian Aquaculture Forum's national and state member associations have prepared and endorsed this Code's 43 points to provide minimum standards for environmental performance. AAF will encourage all aquaculturists to adopt this Code as a statement of the industry's commitment to ecologically sustainable development.

The preparation and distribution of this Code is one of the first steps in a strategy promoting correct environmental practices within the aquaculture industry. The guiding principles outlined in the Code of Conduct will provide specific sectors or regions of the industry with a framework in which they can develop their own Codes of Practice, with a focus on ecological and economic sustainability for their particular culture species, site or culture operation.

The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations has defined aquaculture, or fish farming, as 'the farming of the aquatic organisms, including fish, molluscs, crustaceans and plants. Farming implies some form of intervention in the rearing process to enhance production, such as regular stocking, feeding and protection from predators. Farming also implies individual or corporate ownership of the stock being cultivated.'

In addition to the culture of edible species (such as salmon, oysters and prawns), aquaculture in Australia includes:

- Hatchery production of juveniles for use in growout operations (farms), stocking private or public waterways for recreational fishing, and restocking natural waters for conservation purposes
- Harvesting of eels, microalgae, zooplankton or other organisms from water bodies that are under some form of lease/ or management
- Culture of aquarium and ornamental fish and aquatic plants for sale
- Culture of aquatic organisms for the extraction of pigments, fine chemicals and other products such as pearls, skins and shells
- Value-adding of traditional wild caught species such as rock lobster and southern Bluefin tuna

Principles of the aquaculture industry

To maintain ecological and economic sustainability, the aquaculture industry has adopted a set of principles that form the basis or underlying philosophy for the Code of Conduct:

- Ecologically sustainable development
- Economic viability
- Long-term protection of the environment to ensure availability of suitable sites for aquaculture operations.
- Compliance with, and auditing of adherence to, regulations and the Code of Conduct
- Resource sharing and consideration of other users of the environment
- Research and development to support the achievement of the above five priorities

These principles provide the industry with the mechanism to implement the Code of Conduct as well as providing specific sectors or regions of the industry with the necessary framework for developing their own Code of Practice.

The Code

Industry will work in conjunction with government and other stakeholders to ensure that aquaculture developments are managed sustainably (ecologically and economically) and that their considerable social, economic and environmental advantages are achieved. This will be accomplished through five guiding principles for environmental best practice.

For the Aquaculture Industry to be ecologically and economically sustainable, aquaculturists will:

1. Comply with regulations
2. Respect the rights and safety of others
3. Protect the environment
4. Treat aquatic animals humanely
5. Promote the safety of seafood and other aquatic foods for human consumption

1. To comply with the regulations aquaculturists will:

- Support practical and cost effective strategies to ensure that relevant environmental performance standards are monitored and met.
- Promote appropriate incentives for responsible environmental performance and advocate sanctions for non-compliance.
- Promote effective consultative mechanisms with governments, the community and other users
- Expand self management and co-regulation to include industry-based codes of practice that specifically address environmental issues

2. To respect the rights and safety of others aquaculturists will:

- Recognise the needs of other users of the waterways and promote methods to minimise user conflicts
- Recognise that the use of public resources confers responsibility on the user
- Encourage consultation with the community and other users of the waterways to enable legitimate concerns and issues to be raised and solutions proposed
- Advocate that the farm sites and infrastructure be kept clean and tidy and noise impacts minimised

- Promote goodwill in the local community and provide for farm visits and other opportunities for education and tourism
- Recognise and promote the community benefit from monitoring and reporting on the state of the aquatic environment
- Advocate the installation of appropriate navigational markers and other measures to prevent accidents

3. To protect the environment aquaculturists will:

- Encourage the development and operation of aquaculture in a manner and at a rate in accordance with ecologically sustainable principles
- Support a total catchment approach based on natural resources management which arrests degradation and provides improved outcomes for the sustainable resource use through effective co-operation between government agencies and the community
- Promote industry training and education opportunities in environmental awareness, clean production methods and best practice
- Recognise the importance of good site selection, system design and infrastructure to minimise ecosystem changes
- Monitor and regularly review on-farm management practices to minimise the risk of ecological damage
- Minimise and, where practicable, eliminate the use of agriculture and veterinary chemicals
- Ensure the correct use and disposal of registered chemicals
- Support the development and use of diets and feeding strategies which minimise adverse impacts
- Adopt farm design and on-farm management practices that encourage integration, recycling and reuse of effluents
- Provide for disposal or / and processing of wastes to minimise the risk of ecological damage
- Continue to work with the authorities to control the spread of exotic species
- Continue the development of protocols for dealing with genetically modified material, with particular reference to the capacity of these organisms to produce progeny or genetically modified material themselves
- Work in association with governments to develop appropriate protocols regarding the transfer and culture of exotic species and the translocation of live product within and between states
- Support the maintenance of precise records regarding the transfer or translocation of stock between areas or operations

4. To treat aquatic animals humanely aquaculturists will:

- Seek the development of on-farm expertise in health management and ecological sustainability
- Promote the maintenance of efficient and sustainable stocking densities
- Address the physical and biological requirements of the species to be farmed
- Encourage the installation of anti-predator devices designed to exclude predators without deliberately injuring them
- Seek methods to transfer and harvest which reduce stress to stock
- Endorse the use of humane slaughter methods
- Support the development of appropriate contingency plans to deal with unplanned releases of aquaculture species / stock, or the spread of diseases, parasites and other pathogens
- Encourage the immediate reporting of any mass mortalities of stock or other environmental problems to the relevant agencies and the containment of diseased or infected stock
- Identify responsibilities for environmental monitoring proportionate to possible environmental risk and benefits
- Provide guidelines on reporting and analysis of findings, taking into account the costs and benefits of such monitoring

Commercial Shellfish Aquaculture Leases Jervis Bay, NSW

- Promote the correct disposal of dead stock in a manner which will not render the likelihood of any disease or pathogen being released into natural waterways
- Encourage research and development programs that are funded and supported jointly by industry and governments to expand knowledge and understanding of aquaculture operations and their environmental interactions

5. To promote the safety of seafood and other aquatic foods for human consumption aquaculturists will:

- Support the maintenance, and expansion where necessary, of chemical residue testing as well as shellfish and other quality assurance programs
- Endorse compliance with the requirements of the National Food Hygiene Standards
- Encourage the continued adoption of internationally recognised food quality standards
- Highlight the sensitivity of the waterways to pollution and its resultant effects on the quality and safety of seafoods
- Support the maintenance of precise records regarding the transfer of products destined for human consumption between all links in the distribution and marketing chain
- Support the use of accurate product labelling

Contacts

To find out more about the Code or learn about sustainable aquaculture practices, contact the Australian Aquaculture Forum at PO Box 533, Curtin ACT 2605 phone:(02) 6281 0383 or fax (02) 6281 0438

Australian Aquaculture Forum Member

Tasmanian Aquaculture Council
PO Box 878, Sandy Bay TAS 7006

SA Oyster Growers Association
PMB 49, Port Lincoln SA 5606

NSW Farmers Association – Oyster section
GPO Box 1068, Sydney NSW 2001

Victorian Aquaculture Council
PO Box 3027, South Melbourne VIC 3205

Aquaculture Council of WA
PO Box 55, Mt Hawthorn WA 6016

Oyster Farmers Association of NSW
PO Box 254, Turrumurra NSW 2074

Australian Tuna Boat Owners Association
PO Box 416, Eastwood SA 5063

Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council
Suite2, 39 Darcy Road, Wentworthville NSW 2145

Aquaculture Council of Queensland
PO Box 2064, Bribie Island QLD 4507