

Submission to NSW Planning & Infrastructure

SSI 5657, Commercial Shellfish Aquaculture Leases Jervis Bay, NSW – Environmental Impact Statement

I am writing on behalf of Shoalhaven City Council in response to the call for comments regarding *Commercial Shellfish Aquaculture Leases Jervis Bay, NSW*. This application is the culmination of years of extensive research and consultation. I would like to take the opportunity to provide you with background leading to this application and to provide you with an overview of how important this project is in regard to the Shoalhaven LGA and broader south coast economy.

It is recognised that Jervis Bay is not within the Shoalhaven Local Government Area and as such does not come under the provisions of the Shoalhaven LEP. Council however has a number of interests in this proposal and these will be commented upon below. The main areas of interest to Council are:

- Expansion of an aquaculture industry in southern NSW,
- The regional economic development benefits that will accrue in the local area primarily in the agribusiness sectors but also in the processing/logistics area as well as the local tourist sector.

Background

The Economic Development Office of Shoalhaven City Council has been working closely with the NSW Fisheries since the early 1990's with the specific aim to support, enhance and encourage sustainable aquaculture within the Shoalhaven/south coast and surrounding waterways (including Jervis Bay Territory). The Shoalhaven has a thriving oyster industry and its economic impact on the Shoalhaven cannot be understated. The established oyster industry supports numerous jobs and has a multiplier effect within the local economy. Growth in the aquaculture industry would help strengthen and further broaden our economic base.

Jervis Bay is one of only three marine embayments along the NSW coast that possesses the physical, geographical and ecological characteristics considered suitable for near-shore extensive aquaculture. There have been numerous studies and research programs conducted in Jervis Bay that demonstrate the feasibility of establishing a sustainable aquaculture industry. Between 1991 and 1997, NSW Fisheries conducted two Fisheries Research Development Corporation funded scallop research programs in Jervis Bay. Oyster leases operated in Currumbene Creek until the late 1990's and there has been an intermittent fishery for commercial scallops and flat oysters for many years. Scallop production values in Jervis Bay accounted for 90% for the NSW scallop catch in 1981/1982.

Globally shellfish production has increased significantly – from 1.5 million tons in 1970 to about 16.1 million tons in 2008. It is predicted that global aquaculture will need to increase by 70% to 90 million tonnes in order to satisfy world demand. Australia is a net importer of seafood - 75% of seafood consumed in this country is imported. There is a clear market driven need for Australia to embrace shellfish aquaculture.

Recent history

Experimental mussel farming commenced operations in Jervis Bay on a small scale in 1977. Mussel farming continued until 2008 when operations ceased because JB Mussels Pty Ltd could not continue to renew licences and was unable to financially afford to prepare the necessary approval applications. JB Mussels Pty Ltd was a financially successful enterprise that produced an average of 7.5 tons per annum and provided employment and quality fresh seafood to the local market.

For many years there have been domestic and international interests in developing an aquaculture industry in Jervis Bay. The Economic Development Office and NSW Fisheries have fielded numerous enquiries from potential investors. The main stumbling block in the development of an aquaculture industry has been the complexity and expense associated with the preparation of Environmental Impact Statements. In addition, because of the often generic nature of these statements, pioneering farmers who pay for their preparation frequently bear a disproportionate cost in establishing the necessary environmental credentials. This issue was recognised early on and Council applauds NSW Fisheries for the development of the *Commercial Shellfish Aquaculture Leases Jervis Bay, NSW – Environmental Impact Statement*.

The Economic Development Office has consistently supported the development of a sustainable and long term aquaculture industry within Jervis Bay. From an economic perspective, the aquaculture leases will generate a number of direct and indirect jobs. It has been estimated that after establishment, operation of the leases will directly create 12-15 full time employment positions. Another 8-10 full time positions are estimated to be created indirectly through increased tourism and retail activities. These figures have been calculated by Quanto Pty Ltd and are considered to be conservative. The operation of commercial shellfish aquaculture leases will result in direct benefits to the local economy of Jervis Bay and the Shoalhaven LGA through activities such as the purchase of goods (i.e. fuel and materials) and the use of services (i.e. vessel and vehicle servicing).

It has also been suggested that the operation of commercial shellfish licences will provide tourist operators, including dolphin/whale watching, fishing, sightseeing and diving charters, with an additional attractions to visit during tours. The leases will provide the Jervis Bay tourist industry with an opportunity to diversify visitor's

experiences by visiting the shellfish aquaculture facilities (both in the water and at the land based facilities). This in turn creates greater community awareness about aquaculture and encourages an interest in tourists to source fresh local seafood.

The Economic Development Office has maintained a close relationship with the University of Wollongong – Shoalhaven Campus. Shoalhaven City Council contributed financially to the University for the development of the internationally renowned Shoalhaven Marine and Freshwater Centre. The operation of commercial shellfish leases in Jervis Bay would be supported by research conducted by the university into best practice aquaculture and the joint promotion of a clean, green, local product. Support from the University of Wollongong Shoalhaven Marine and Freshwater Centre will help conform to the Jervis Bay Marine Park mandate for awareness raising and education.

Within the Jervis Bay Marine Park plan of management there is provision for 440 hectares of embayment to be used for aquaculture purposes. This application is consistent with this plan of management and considerable consultation with user groups has been undertaken to explain the impacts of the proposal. The current zoning plan and operational plan for the Jervis Bay Marine Park allows for extensive long-line aquaculture on no more than 2% of the area of the marine park.

Conclusion

Shoalhaven City Council has constantly supported the development of shellfish aquaculture within Jervis Bay as long as:

- It doesn't interfere with Naval operations
- It doesn't adversely impact on commercial tourist vessel navigation and
- That it adequately addresses impacts associated with the land water interface.

The EIS adequately considered the first two points. If leases are approved, any successful tenderer will be required to comply with local government provision relating to the siting of land based activities or use of boat ramps and wharves in the area. Land water interface impacts will not be able to be adequately assessed until successful tenderers submit the relevant planning documentation to Council. It must be noted that Shoalhaven City Council does have suitable land available for industrial activities at Woollamia Industrial Estate. There is also a regional boat ramp located at Woollamia with access to Currambene Creek.

Detailed presentations about the proposal have been made to several Council briefings by NSW Fisheries and at each presentation, council and community members have been supportive of the proposal.

Council supports the application by NSW Fisheries for 50 hectares of commercial shellfish aquaculture leases within Jervis Bay.



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