



## **SAOGA – oyster farming**

SAOGA, or the South Australian Oyster Growers Association Inc., is an industry association which represents and supports oyster growers of South Australia at the regional, state and national level.

SAOGA was first established in 1989 by a group of oyster farmers on the Eyre Peninsula who saw a growing need to take a collaborative approach towards the management of the oyster farming in South Australia.

In the early years, SAOGA attracted a formal membership of approximately 40 oyster licence holders. Today, SAOGA's membership is around 100 which is approximately 98% of all oyster licence holders in South Australia.

SAOGA represents oyster growers on the SA Aquaculture Inter-Management Committee, Seafood Council, Australian Shellfish Quality Assurance Committee, Eyre Regional Development Board - Aquaculture Target Team, SA Fisheries Research Advisory Board and National EPA Bilge water Committee. In addition, SAOGA takes an active role in negotiating with State Government on issues such as licence conditions and fees.

### **Networking**

Currently, commercial oyster farming operates out of Smoky Bay, Streaky Bay, Murat Bay, Denial Bay, Kangaroo Island, Franklin Harbour, Stansbury, Coobowie and Coffin Bay. These areas are spread right across South Australia, from the south-east to the far-west (a shortest route distance of approximately 13 hours drive).

To compensate for the inherent isolation caused by these distances, SAOGA has established a communication system where each growing area is represented by a Zone Representative (see attached). These representatives attend SAOGA Executive Committee meetings and report on behalf of the oyster growers in their respective area.

Zone Representatives are very active in their roles. They frequently organise zone meetings to relay information passed to them from the Executive, as well to gather the thoughts and opinions of individual growers.

To maintain the strong grower network which has developed over recent years, SAOGA also conducts an annual two day seminar (carried out in a different oyster growing area each year) which aims to serve two main purposes:

- To build professional and personal links; and
- To inform and up-date growers of new developments within the industry.

### **Code of Practice**

The Code of Practice, which covers all aspects of shellfish farming including harvesting, product handling and transportation, is intended to ensure that SAOGA member farmers adopt the highest professional standards for the culture of oysters without unduly restricting the right of individual farmers to experiment with novel methods of production.

The Code of Practice is available from SAOGA's Executive Committee.

## **SA Shellfish Quality Assurance Program (SASQAP)**

The South Australian Quality Assurance Program (SASQAP) is a program designed to provide public health protection for consumers of South Australian shellfish.

Under the Program, shellfish harvesting can only occur in areas which have been “approved” or “conditionally approved areas”. This is deemed a “clean waters” approach to water classification which is preferred by the USA and is also used in Tasmania and Victoria.

As a part of the Program, water and oyster samples are taken from prearranged sampling stations within each harvesting area prior to the harvest season and sent for testing. Random sampling also occurs throughout the harvesting season.

Daily visual inspections of the growing area are performed and any unusual environmental phenomena, such as a bird or fish kill, water discolouration or abnormal shellfish behaviour are reported to the SASQAP manager.

If all microbiological criteria are not met, the area will be immediately closed to shellfish harvesting.

All shellfish farmers (including Pacific Oyster farmers) must contribute to SASQAP through licence fees which is managed by Primary Industries and Resources SA (PIRSA).

The success of the program has been dependent on the cooperative relationship between SASQAP administration and the shellfish farming industry.

## **Quality Assurance and SQF2000**

Legislation under the new Australian Food Standards Code will mean that all food related businesses in Australia, including aquaculture ventures, will be required to implement a Food Safety and Quality program by the year 2005.

SAOGA are taking a holistic approach to the new legislation and are implementing a single Food Safety and Quality Program across the association.

There are many different types of Food Safety and Quality programs available. The program known as SQF2000 (Safe Quality Food 2000) has been selected by SAOGA to be adopted in the near future.

## **SA Oyster Research Council**

South Australia’s pristine waters and “green” reputation combined with the marketing efforts of OYSA (see below) make South Australian Pacific oysters well accepted in the domestic market and in an extremely strong position to enter overseas markets. There are, however, several constraints to market expansion at this stage of the industry’s development including consistency of supply, consistency of quality, production technology and satisfying strict overseas (particularly U.S.) import regulations.

SAOGA has recognised that for the industry to become a highly productive and economically and environmentally sustainable industry, extensive research must be undertaken. It is only then that the oyster industry will have the skills and knowledge available to maximise its potential.

Consequently, SAOGA are establishing a research fund used specifically for the use of industry development research and development projects. This fund which will be administered by the SA Oyster Research Council will encourage the development of strategic R&D programs, which will ensure the long term viability, and environmental sustainability of the industry.

## Site Rehabilitation Scheme

SAOGA's Site Rehabilitation Scheme was first established in 1995 to ensure that all farm infrastructure and debris was removed from a site in the event that a licence holder files for bankruptcy. The monies collected by the Scheme, which to date has not been used, is held in a trust fund and administered by SAOGA. The Scheme is considered an important component of ensuring good-will between growers and other resource users as well as ensuring environmentally sustainable development.

All oyster licence holders (issued by Primary Industries and Resources SA Aquaculture) are required, as well as a part of their licence conditions, to contribute to the Site Rehabilitation Scheme at a rate of \$20 / hectare /yr (1998 value).

## Site Insurance

One condition of an oyster license, issued by PIRSA Aquaculture, is that license holders must hold 3<sup>rd</sup> Party Public Liability insurance for their farm site.

As a result, SAOGA has organised 3<sup>rd</sup> Party Public Liability Insurance for all their members. This policy covers members against claims made in the event of injury to persons other than farm employees.

Workers compensation is the individual licence holder's responsibility.

## Oyster Environmental Monitoring Program

Since 1991, an Oyster Environmental Monitoring Program (OEMP; formerly known as Shellfish Environmental Monitoring Program) has been undertaken by the South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI) in conjunction with oyster growers.

The OEMP aims to monitor the environmental effects of intertidal oyster farming developments whilst complying with the requirements of government licences and regulations. It also aims to address any community concerns regarding the development of public waters.

The OEMP is a biannual program which sees SARDI scientists visit the major oyster growing areas of SA, monitor water quality parameters and investigate a number of environmental parameters.

## OYSA Ltd.

OYSA the marketing arm of SAOGA, was first established in 1994 when oyster growers in SA began to realise the benefits of forming a network to bulk-buy equipment and market their produce through a single marketing body.

Today, OYSA has more than 60 shareholders and operates under a well recognised and respected "OYSA Oyster" label.

The mission of OYSA is to supply customers with quality oysters from the clean waters of SA. In addition, the objectives of OYSA are to:

- develop and maintain total quality management systems,
- strengthen export markets, and
- promote OYSA and strengthen links into the SA and interstate markets.

In 1998 OYSA secured a deal with a Japanese oyster trading company to supply 1,000 dozen live oysters to Japan each week. This deal which has been over 14 months in the making is an

important bench-mark and one which is considered the beginning of bigger and better things for the SA oyster industry.

### **Further Information**

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**Last update: August, 2003**

**Agdex: 477/10**

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