Port River POMS outbreak

The following questions address some of the most common queries related to the outbreak of Pacific Oyster Mortality Syndrome (POMS) in the Port River.

What is the POMS virus?
Pacific Oyster Mortality Syndrome (POMS) is a virus that causes rapid death and high mortality rates in Pacific Oysters. The disease spreads quickly if introduced and is a serious threat to the oyster farming industry (mortalities of up to 100% can occur on oyster farms within days).

The virus poses no food safety or human health concerns; and South Australian oysters remain safe to eat.

More information is available at www.pir.sa.gov.au/poms

What happened in the Port River?
In February 2018, samples taken by Primary Industries and Regions SA (PIRSA) during routine surveillance of the Port River area detected an outbreak of Pacific Oyster Mortality Syndrome (POMS) in feral Pacific Oysters in the Port River.

What is the current status of POMS in the Port River?
Testing and monitoring of the feral oyster population and POMS outbreaks in the Port River occurs regularly as part of current research projects. Further outbreaks are expected to occur during 2018/19 when seawater temperatures rise above 17°C.

Eradication of feral Pacific oysters and the virus is not achievable in the Port Adelaide River area. While the virus may remain inactive during cooler months, extended periods of warmer water temperatures above 17°C may provide conditions for the virus to activate and thus outbreaks to occur.

Are there restrictions for Port River users?
To reduce the risk of POMS spreading, PIRSA has implemented a ban on the removal of all bivalve shellfish (this includes oysters, mussels, cockles and razorfish) from the Port River and surrounding area, including West Lakes. This closure area has now been extended to include all waters east of a line between between Point Gawler and the Outer Harbor breakwaters,

including Section Bank. Bivalves should not be taken from the closure area for any purpose, including bait or berley. Fines apply.

My boat is docked in the Port River – do I need to take any action?
Yes. Fishers and boat operators can help stop the spread of POMS by ensuring they follow these steps before their vessels leave the Port River for other locations:

- Ensure vessel hulls are clean and remove marine growth and animals from fishing and boating equipment and clothing, so you don't transfer pests and diseases to other waterways. Boat owners should refer to the guidelines for good vessel cleaning practices available at: www.pir.sa.gov.au/biosecurity/aquatics/biofouling_and_ballast_water
- Wash boats and equipment with light household detergent, rinse with tap water without letting the water drain into waterways, and importantly dry completely before moving to another waterway.
- Larger vessels should regularly inspect hulls, remove/clean the vessel for macro-biofouling when present, maintain antifouling applications and develop a biofouling management plan for your vessel.
- Adhere to the ban on removing bivalve shellfish from the Port River and surrounding area, including West Lakes.
- Never use seafood sold for human consumption (including imported seafood) as bait or berley.
- Never discard or store live Pacific Oysters or their shells in any SA waters. It is an offence under the *Fisheries Management Act 2007* to release or deposit exotic and/or aquaculture farmed species (such as Pacific Oysters) into the waters of South Australia and fines of up to $120,000 may apply.

Can I fish, swim or kayak in the Port River?
Yes, recreational Port River and West Lakes users are not at any risk.

The virus poses no threat to food safety or human health, however, the ban on removing bivalve shellfish must be observed.

Kayakers and small vessel users on the Port River should observe the recommended cleaning practice of washing their vessel with light household detergent without allowing water drain into waterways before moving to other bodies of water.

Is it safe to eat shop-bought oysters?
Yes, South Australia produces some of the finest Pacific Oysters on the market and oysters purchased from retailers, restaurants and fish processors are safe to eat.

What's at stake?
POMS is a virus that causes major production and economic losses in commercial Pacific Oyster farms. South Australia's oyster growing industry is valued at $41 million and supports regional jobs and communities.

All commercial oyster growing areas in South Australia remain free of disease, with the closest oyster farming area 60 km from the Port River estuary. Containing the virus to Port River is critical to protect the oyster industry from the potential impact of POMS.

What are PIRSA and the oyster industry doing about POMS?
In addition to the ban on removing bivalve shellfish from the area, PIRSA continues to test and monitor the feral oyster population and POMS outbreaks in the Port River.

PIRSA is also working closely with the oyster industry on statewide early detection surveillance, as well as strategic knockdowns of feral oysters in growing regions.
Fixed infrastructure biofouling in the Port River is being addressed by strategic oyster knockdowns. Areas with high oyster density and at high vessel traffic locations are being targeted.

Community participation in preventing the spread of POMS is vital. A public awareness campaign is being undertaken with signage, social media activity and Fishcare Volunteer patrols planned to educate fishers and Port River users on the ban and good vessel cleaning practices.

South Australia's oyster industry and PIRSA continue to work together to ensure all reasonable measures are in place to minimise the risk of infection to oyster farming areas across the State.

How do I report suspected cases of aquatic diseases?
The community is encouraged to be vigilant and report all suspected aquatic diseases or pests so they can be investigated.

POMS is a notifiable disease. If you suspect a large scale mortality in oysters, immediately report to Fishwatch on 1800 065 522 or online at:
www.pir.sa.gov.au/biosecurity/animal_health/reporting_animal_disease