



Aquaculture Zones Project

*Newsletter No. 3
February 2013*

Mid West Aquaculture Zone Project

Aquaculture zone approach

The Western Australian Government has allocated \$1.85 million for the establishment of two aquaculture zones to facilitate development of the marine finfish aquaculture industry. The zones will be established in the Kimberley and Mid West regions of the State.

An aquaculture zone will provide an 'investment ready' platform for organisations proposing to set up commercial finfish aquaculture operations. The growth of the marine finfish aquaculture sector will provide significant economic benefits to the Mid West region through job opportunities and economic diversification.

An aquaculture zone management approach will allow the Department of Fisheries and the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) to consider potential cumulative impacts when planning for multiple aquaculture operations. Potential cumulative impacts and environmental management procedures will be determined upfront, before any aquaculture ventures commence. This will ensure the special values of the marine environment are not affected when multiple finfish aquaculture operations are established in an area.

The Department has considered the existing uses and values of the Mid West marine environment and is currently evaluating the suitability of potential locations for finfish aquaculture.

Size and location of the Mid West Zone

The Mid West Aquaculture Zone (Zone) will occupy an area of 2,000-3,000 hectares (ha) within State waters of the Mid West region of Western Australia (WA). The Department of Fisheries (Department) is currently determining where to locate the Zone and has identified some potentially suitable areas, using a range of site selection criteria, including those on the map shown in Figure 1. The map shows an area of 32,000 ha within the Abrolhos Islands State waters. The 2,000-3,000 ha Zone will likely be located within this broad area. Another potentially suitable location is off Port Gregory.

Your Comments are Sought

Local knowledge and stakeholder advice provided to the Department are important in determining the Zone's location. Therefore, stakeholders are encouraged to submit their comments.

After considering your input, the Department will decide the location of the Zone in mid-March 2013.

Any initial comments and feedback you have in relation to the location of the Mid West zone should ideally refer to the map below (Figure 1).

Please provide your initial comments to the Department of Fisheries, Aquaculture Branch **by 15 March 2013** by sending:

- mail to Locked Bag 39 Cloisters Square, Perth WA 6850, or
- email john.eyres@fish.wa.gov.au to

The Next Step of the Process

Your submissions will be used to narrow down the potential locations for the Zone. Subsequently, expert technical analyses will be used identify the most suitable location from within the refined area.

The Department will develop a Management Plan to ensure aquaculture within the Zone is planned, monitored and regulated to minimise any impact on the environmental, commercial, social and cultural values of the area. Through a formal tender process, the Department will commission an environmental consultancy, with relevant expertise in marine ecosystems, to conduct technical studies. This work will also provide the comprehensive data and information that the EPA will use in its strategic environmental assessment process.

The Department welcomes the opportunity to meet with stakeholder representatives to discuss issues and consider recommendations. Information on the Mid West Zone Project is available on the Department's website, www.fish.wa.gov.au; stakeholders can also register for project updates by email and there will be opportunities to meet with project managers during the course of the project. To request further information, or to arrange a meeting, please contact John Eyres, Mid West Aquaculture Zone Project Manager by email, john.eyres@fish.wa.gov.au or phone, (08) 9482 7377.

As the peak industry body representing the commercial fishing and aquaculture sectors in WA, WAFIC will be undertaking the consultation process with commercial and aquaculture sectors.

As the peak body representing the recreational fishers in WA, Recfishwest will be the primary point of contact for recreational fishers on the Mid West Zones Project.

The Department will confer directly with other stakeholders.

Table 1. Schedule of work for the Mid West Aquaculture Zone Project

Major milestones for the project	Timing
Opportunity for stakeholder to comment: Project notification and site selection	January to mid-March 2013
Opportunity for stakeholder to comment: EPA level of assessment set	May 2013
1 st field data collection period	July 2013
2 nd field data collection period	March 2014
Opportunity for stakeholder to comment: Model outputs and draft Management Plan	July 2014
Submission of approval document to EPA	August 2014
Formal public comment period: EPA report is submitted to the Minister	November 2014
Zone in place	December 2014
Opportunities for stakeholder to use the Zone: Implementation	December 2014 onwards

Other opportunities to comment

You will have several opportunities to comment on the key stages of the project. These opportunities are highlighted in the table above. In addition to providing comments to the Department, you will have the opportunity to comment on the various stages of the EPA process (on issues such as the referral, level of assessment and the scoping document).

Late in 2014, there will be a formal comment period for stakeholders to comment on the development of the Mid West Zone and its Management Plan (Table 1).

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What does the Department want by 15 March?

The Department is seeking your initial comments on what you believe is the best location for a 2,000-3,000 ha zone within the 32,000 ha area or the Port Gregory area, shown on the map.

The Department is also seeking your comments relating to the existing uses and values of potential locations within the areas identified, which may help it determine the most appropriate zone to accommodate all stakeholder needs.

To whom and when do I need to provide feedback?

Please provide your written feedback **no later than 15 March 2013** to John Eyres of Department of Fisheries, Aquaculture Branch by sending:

- mail to Locked Bag 39 Cloisters Square, WA 6850, or
- email to john.eyres@fish.wa.gov.au

What happens after 15 March?

The Department will consolidate the comments and recommendations for consideration of those views in refining the location of the Zone.

Will I have another opportunity to comment?

Yes, there will be multiple opportunities to comment, as outlined in the above table.

Who will manage the Zone?

The Department will manage and regulate operations within the Zone. The Department will enforce aquaculture licence conditions and ensure compliance with regulations.

How will the Zone be managed?

The Zone will be managed through a Zone Management Plan, which the Department will develop as part of the strategic environmental assessment approval process.

How big an area could the Zone cover?

The Zone will likely occupy an area of 2,000-3,000 ha.

What will aquaculture in the zone look like?

Aquaculture production systems within the Zone will probably use conventional floating sea cages, which use circular flotation rings to support a net. These systems are usually set within a grid and anchored to the sea bed.

How big is a sea-cage for marine finfish?

Polar-Cirke[®]-type surface cages are typically 25-50 metres in diameter.

How many leases will be granted within the Zone?

The Zone Management Plan will identify the number and size of aquaculture operations that can be established in the Zone. Technical studies, expert advice and ecosystem modelling will provide an understanding of the carrying capacity of the environment and enable appropriate aquaculture management strategies for the Zone to be set as standards in the Zone Management Plan.

Can I access and fish in the Zone?

Yes, you can access the Zone and fishing within it will be allowed; however, interference with aquaculture gear and fishing inside sea-cages is not permitted.

Will the Zone be marked?

The Department of Transport will require sea-cages to be marked with lights and signage to aid navigation.

What is a strategic environmental assessment?

A strategic environmental assessment is a systematic decision support process, aiming to ensure that environmental and other sustainability aspects of policy, planning and management are considered effectively. Strategic environmental assessment is usually large-scale and intended to support sustainable development by ensuring the incorporation of environmental considerations into management plans for subsequent activities. This process is undertaken for proposals which identify future proposals likely, if implemented in combination with each other, to have a significant effect on the environment.

The strategic environmental assessment process aims to be transparent and promote good governance by utilising public participation and high quality information. In WA, the EPA's strategic environmental assessment process requires environmental impact assessment and consideration of potential cumulative impacts. Approval of the Mid West Aquaculture Zone strategic proposal will afford, by way of derived approvals, a streamlined process for aquaculture operators to start ventures within the Zone.

What is a derived approval?

Derived approval is the term given to an approval granted for a derived proposal. Derived proposals are those subject to conditions of an assessed strategic proposal and raises no new environmental risks; the environmental risks raised by the proposal were adequately assessed when the strategic proposal was assessed; and there is no new information that would justify a re-assessment of these risks. A derived approval is typically granted with consideration given to a proposal's co-location and association with an overarching strategic environmental assessment of a large-scale development precinct.

How will the Department ensure the conservation and environmental values of the Fish Habitat Protection area are protected?

Technical studies, expert advice and ecosystem modelling will provide a thorough understanding of the carrying capacity of the environment and enable appropriate aquaculture management strategies for the Zone to be set as standards in the Zone Management Plan. The Zone management approach ensures aquaculture in the Zone will be environmentally responsible and socially acceptable prior to granting leases and setting conditions on licences. The management approach for the Zone will bring added protection to the environmental and cultural values of the region by superseding the case-by-case management approach for granting authorisations, which has limited capacity to account for cumulative impacts. It will also protect the rights of aquaculture operators within the Zone.

The Zone Management Plan will be enforced through aquaculture licence conditions and ensure any influence of finfish aquaculture on marine flora and fauna, water quality, benthic habitats and biodiversity is minimal. Biosecurity arrangements for the Zone will adopt a risk-based process to minimise the outbreak of disease and protect biodiversity by minimising the risk of fish escaping. The Management Plan will require ongoing monitoring of operations and include a set of triggers and responses for adaptive management. The Department will enforce strict regulations, conditions and EPA standards.

What about the existing finfish aquaculture site?

The existing site may lie within or adjacent to the Zone, or it may be remote from it. In the first two of these cases, the Zone Management Plan will recognise and accommodate the existing rights of the licence holder, according to the outcome of the technical studies.

I'm a commercial fisher; how will the Zone affect me?

You will be able to undertake commercial fishing activities inside the Zone, providing your activities are undertaken outside of the sea-cages and do not interfere with aquaculture gear, including markers and anchors.

I'm a recreational fisher; how will the Zone affect me?

You will be able to fish inside the Zone, providing you fish on the outside of the sea-cages. The aquaculture gear and stock must not be disturbed by your activities.

I'm a charter boat operator; how will the Zone affect me?

The Department does not foresee any activities outside of the Zone being affected by its presence. Areas suitable for the location of the Mid West Zone are unlikely to coincide with many recreational activities. Any potential influence of aquaculture on recreational activities will be managed through the Zone Management Plan. Aquaculture lease holders within the Zone will be required to operate in accordance to licence conditions and meet environmental quality standards.

I'm in the tourism business; how will the Zone affect me?

The Zone will not affect your access to, or activities inside or outside, the areas identified as potential locations for the Zone. The Department expects the Zone could increase tourism opportunities by providing additional features of interest.

Will the cage farms within the Zone be located on prime fishing grounds?

No. An aquaculture cage farm is ideally located over a sandy or rocky sea bed, not over or next to reefs, corals or other outcrops.

As an aquaculture proponent, can I still apply for a site outside the zone, or can I grow species other than marine finfish at a site inside the zone?

Yes, you can apply for a lease for a site outside the zone and to grow non-marine finfish species inside the zone. These applications will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis under the current process and in both cases the full environmental assessment process will apply. Derived approvals will only apply to organisations that want to grow marine finfish species at a site within the zone and that meet the requirements determined by the strategic environmental approval.

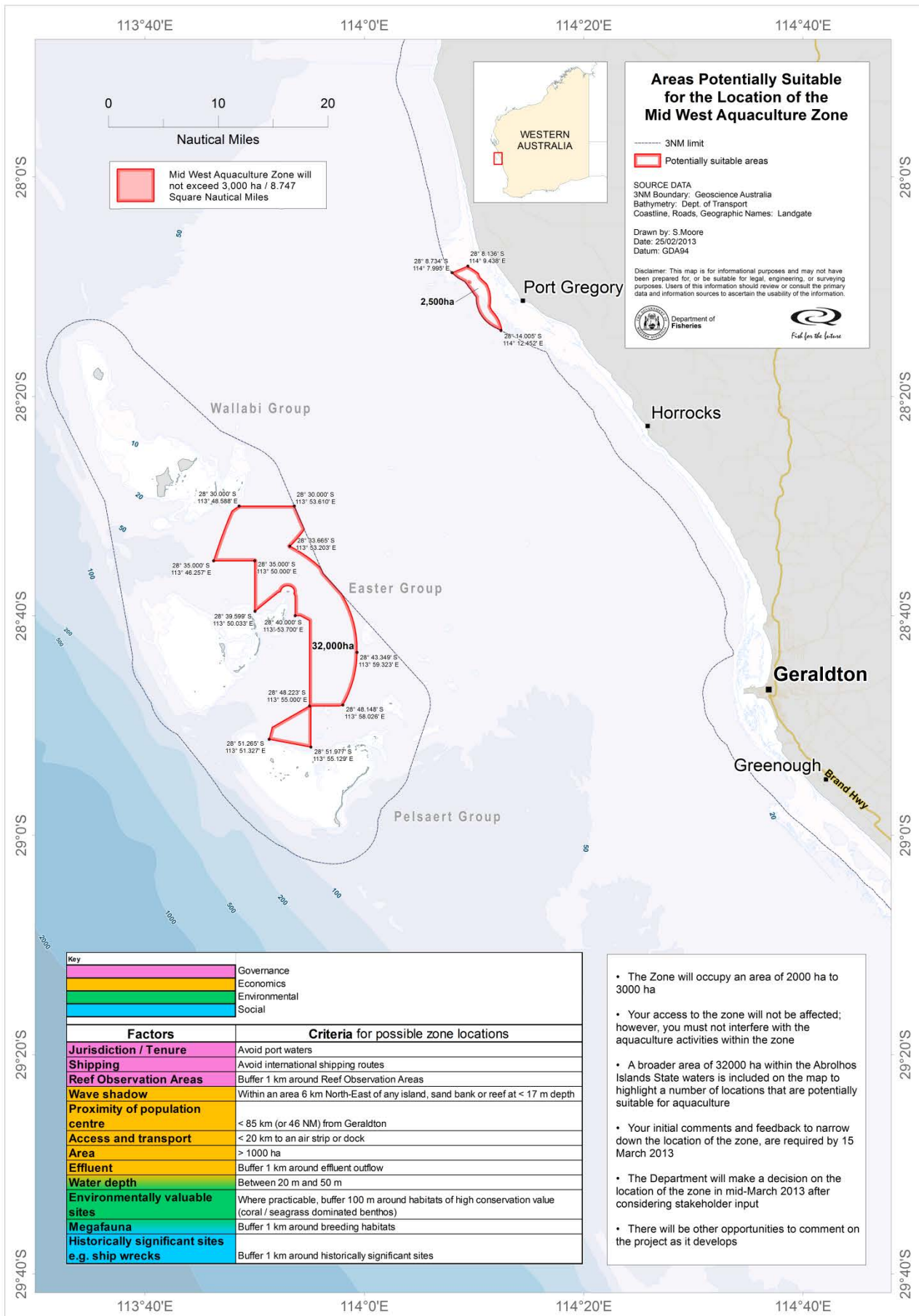


Figure 1: Areas potentially suitable for the location of the Mid West Aquaculture Zone.