



Aquaculture Zones Project

Newsletter # 7
September
2015

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Regional Aquaculture Zones



Regional aquaculture zones form part of a strategic planning approach to aquaculture development. This approach is regarded as best regulatory practice and a key method of providing for industry growth while achieving ecologically sustainable development outcomes. To date, the regional zone methodology has been used successfully to establish significant marine aquaculture industries in other Australian States.

The Western Australian Government is committed to the development of sustainable marine aquaculture in Western Australia. To facilitate this commitment, the Minister for Fisheries announced a funding package to enable the establishment of two regional zones. The first of these, the Kimberley Aquaculture Development Zone in WA's northern waters, was officially declared in August 2014.

The proposed Mid West Aquaculture Development Zone (zone), located in the southern part of the Abrolhos Islands Fish Habitat Protection Area (FHPA), is the second such proposed regional zone.

About the Mid West Aquaculture Development Zone

The zone is located in the FHPA between the Pelsaert and Easter groups of the Abrolhos archipelago, approximately 65 km west of Geraldton. The location has a confluence of temperate and tropical sea life, forming one of the State's unique marine areas. This presents a rare opportunity for the aquaculture of a range of finfish species that occur across the West Coast region of the State.

The zone comprises some 3,000 hectares spread over two areas - a 2,200 hectare northern area and an 800 hectare southern area (an existing licensed aquaculture site). The specific location of these areas is shown at Figure 1.

The zone has several physical attributes that lend themselves well to finfish aquaculture, with relatively deep (35 to 45 metre), clean, well-flushed waters and an open, sandy sea floor. Collectively, these attributes contribute towards minimal environmental impact from the proposed aquaculture activity.

The zone is being created through an environmental assessment process as a **strategic proposal** under Part IV of the *Environmental Protection Act 1986* (EP Act). This approach will provide the opportunity for fish farmers to refer their aquaculture proposals to the EPA as **derived proposals**. The benefits are a more streamlined assessment process that provides for timely aquaculture development, while identifying any potential (cumulative) environmental impacts and ensuring effective management measures are in place to control these.

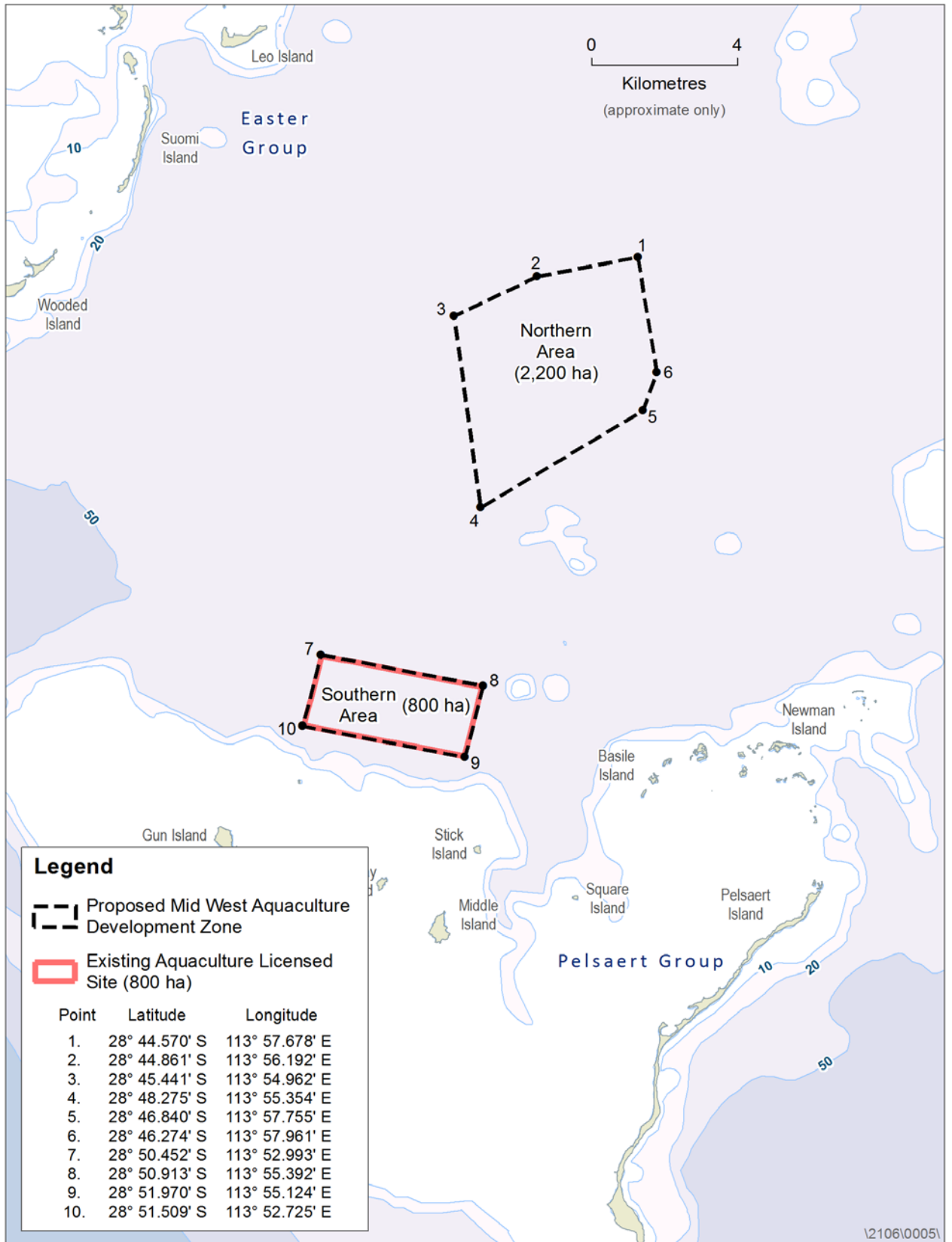


Figure 1. Proposed Mid West Aquaculture Development Zone



Management of aquaculture inside the zone

The Department is developing an integrated framework to manage aquaculture inside the zone.

The purpose of the **Management Framework** is to guide the ecologically sustainable development of marine finfish aquaculture through streamlined assessment and planning processes and to provide a feedback mechanism to continuously improve the efficacy of monitoring and management activities.

The **Management Framework** comprises the **Zone Management Policy** and several **associated instruments** and **documents** i.e. Environmental Monitoring and Management Plan (EMMP); Ministerial Statement; notices; aquaculture licence; aquaculture lease; Management and Environment Monitoring Plan (MEMP).

The overarching Zone Management Policy addresses strategic issues that are unlikely to change in the medium term, while the associated instruments and documents are more adaptable and provide the capacity for adaptive management in the shorter term. Together these documents aim to:

- Establish an overarching, integrated structure for managing the aquaculture activities within the zone;
- Provide clear, efficient and effective processes for monitoring, evaluating and reporting;
- Continuously improve the approach being used to manage the zone;
- Guide the development of finfish aquaculture; and
- Ensure adaptive management occurs as part of a process of continuous improvement.

Operational requirements inside the zone

In accordance with environmental approvals there will be a number of requirements that govern operations within the Zone.

Species to be cultured will be restricted to marine finfish native to the West Coast Region of Western Australia, including Yellowtail kingfish; Mahi mahi; Pink snapper; Mulloway; Coral trout; various cod and tropical snapper species. **Translocation approval** will be required to move fish and operators will need to comply with all other relevant legislation.

Approved **Culture Methods** will likely be floating sea cages with the size determined by the operators. There will be standards associated with net and mesh size, type and quality, anchorage and mooring infrastructure etc. There will also be regular inspections and maintenance required under operational and approvals processes. **Marking and Lighting** will be required on all equipment and licensees should note that the zone is a **Non-Exclusive Access** area. Non-exclusive access means that members of the public and vessels will have access to the zone, provided they do not interfere with the aquaculture equipment or contained fish.

Stock Biomass Limits and Production Capacity are set out in the **Management Policy** with the maximum permissible stock biomass of marine finfish per licence holder being directly proportional to the licence holders total lease area within the zone. The maximum limit for the zone is proposed to be 24,000 tonnes of finfish biomass.

The zone is considered to be one **Biosecurity Unit** due to the relatively close proximity of aquaculture facilities and physical environment of the FHPA. Operators must comply with all biosecurity legislation and address biosecurity principles in their MEMP. This will assist in disease prevention and the spread of invasive marine species and must include:

- Record keeping;
- Biosecurity emergency procedures;
- Disposal of waste;
- Disease testing protocols and quarantine;
- Management of fish escapes.

Each facility must also have a **Biosecurity Manager** who is responsible for ensuring biosecurity.



There will be compulsory compliance and reporting arrangements within the zone to ensure the environmental and economic sustainability of aquaculture development in Western Australia.

Environmental Impact Assessment process

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for the zone is guided by the requirements specified by the EPA Environmental Scoping Document.

A number of **studies and reviews** were conducted and **baseline data** collected including:

- Water and sediment quality
- Seafloor habitat types
- Waves and currents

Relevant data were imputed into integrated environmental models to predict the effects of the proposed aquaculture on the marine environment, including **cumulative impacts**. Potential **interactions** with wildlife and fisheries were also assessed.

Modelling indicated the effects of organic deposition on biological communities were constrained to the area of sea floor within the immediate vicinity of the sea cages. Modelling predicted that any concentrations of phytoplankton in the water column would rapidly disperse, indicating a **low risk** of phytoplankton blooms.

The results of technical studies, modelling and associated information will be released as a **Public Environmental Review** (PER) document and will be available for public comment during the **PER period**. Comments will be considered by the Department of Fisheries (Department) and the EPA, prior to any approval of the zone.

Where to next?

Stakeholder representatives will have an opportunity to meet with the Department to discuss their interests, concerns and issues relating to the proposed zone and PER. The PER document will comprise:

- Environmental Impact Statement
- Environmental Monitoring and Management Plan
- Zone Management Policy
- Additional specific management plans

Table 1 indicates planned consultation arrangements.

All parties, including the general public, will have an opportunity to comment on the proposal during the PER period. The PER period is likely to commence early 2016. At that time the PER document will be available to stakeholders on the Department's website, www.fish.wa.gov.au

Table 1. Opportunities to meet with the Department of Fisheries Zones Project Group

<i>Interest Group</i>	<i>Perth</i>	<i>Interest Group</i>	<i>Geraldton</i>
WAFIC members	22 Oct. 2015 10:00am - 12:00pm WAFIC Board Room	Government organisations	14 Oct. 2015 3:00pm - 4:30pm Department of Fisheries Regional Office - Conference Room
ACWA members	6 Oct. 2015 10:00am - 12:00pm WAFIC Board Room	Other commercial entities	15 Oct. 2015 9:30am - 11:00am Department of Fisheries Regional Office - Conference Room
Other commercial entities	8 Oct. 2015 10:00am - 12:00pm Department of Fisheries Head Office - Conference Room	Non-government organisations	15 Oct. 2015 11:00am - 12:30pm Department of Fisheries Regional Office - Conference Room
Recfishwest members	8 Oct. 2015 2:00pm - 4:00pm Department of Fisheries Head Office - Conference Room	General public (community reps.)	15 Oct. 2015 2:00pm - 3:30pm Department of Fisheries Regional Office - Conference Room
Government organisations	9 Oct. 2015 10:00am - 12:00pm Department of Fisheries Head Office - Conference Room	Recfishwest members	15 Oct. 2015 4:00pm - 5:30pm Mid West Development Commission - Board Room
Non-government organisations	9 Oct. 2015 1:00pm - 3:00pm Department of Fisheries Head Office - Conference Room	WAFIC members	16 Oct. 2015 9:00am - 12:00pm Mid West Development Commission - Board Room
General public (community reps.)	9 Oct. 2015 3:00pm - 5:00pm Department of Fisheries Head Office - Conference Room	ACWA members	16 Oct. 2015 1:00pm - 2:30pm Mid West Development Commission - Board Room

For more information you can email aquaculture@fish.wa.gov.au