

## STATEMENT OF DECISION

### APPLICATION TO VARY AN AQUACULTURE LICENCE

**File Number:** L2532/13-02  
**Applicant:** Abrolhos Aquaculture Australia Pty Ltd  
**Application Date:** 23 August 2018  
**Application Type:** Variation of an Authorisation

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### Background facts

Abrolhos Aquaculture Australia Pty Ltd (“AAA”) (ACN 008 819 261) is the holder of Aquaculture Licence No. 1574 (“the Licence”).

The Licence authorises the culture of the following species:

- Bat wing pearl oyster (*Pteria penguin*);
- Black lip pearl oyster (*Pinctada margaritifera*); and
- Akoya pearl oyster (*Pinctada fucata*);

Under the Licence the authorised site includes 0.887 hectares of water (**Attachment 1**) and a land-based hatchery facility (**Attachment 2**) within the Easter Group at the Abrolhos Islands and is subject to certain conditions.

On 23 August 2018, AAA made an application to the CEO of the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (“Department”) under s.142 of the *Fish Resources Management Act 1994* (“the Act”), to vary the Licence to add a jetty facility and various species.

### Details of the Licence variation application

The application was received by the Department on 26 July 2018 and paid by the proponent on 23 August 2018.

The application seeks to vary Schedule 1 of the Licence to include the following species:

- scallops: (*Amusium balloti*) and (*Chlamys australis*);
- clams: (*Tapes literatus*), (*Tapes dorsatus*), (*Tridacna maxima*), (*Tridacna squamosal*) (*Tridacna derasa*);
- rock oysters: (*Saccostrea spp.*);
- sea cucumbers: *Holothuridae*, *Holothuria scabra*, *Actinopyga spp.*;
- sponges: (*Hymedesmiidae*), (*Latrunculiidae*), (*Mycalidae*), (*Irciniidae*), (*Spongidae*), (*Thorectidae*);
- sea urchins: (*Tripneustes gratilla*), (*Tripneustes spp.*), (*Toxopneustidae*)

In addition, AAA is seeking to vary Schedule 2 of the Licence to add a jetty facility that is owned by AAA (**Attachment 3**).

## **2 COMPETENCE OF THE APPLICATION**

The application has been made under s.142(1)(a) of the Act, which provides that –

*“The CEO may vary an authorisation if – (a) the holder of the authorisation applies to the CEO for the variation;”*

Section 142(2) of the Act states that *“if a person applies to the CEO for the variation of an authorisation the person is not entitled to the variation as of right”*.

I consider that seeking to include various species to the authority of the licence constitutes a “variation” within the meaning of the Act, in the same way that substituting an entirely different area or partially replacing the area would constitute a variation.

There are no express limitations on the face of the provision; the power therefore appears to be unconstrained.

Although s.142(1)(a) does not provide for any express limitations on the exercise of the power in respect of an aquaculture licence, or any other authorisation, I regard s.142 as a general provision that is intended to enable variation of an authorisation where that would not be in conflict with other provisions of the Act that are more restrictive or exhaustive.

In my view it would be unreasonable to use the legislation to prevent a new licence from being granted for a certain activity in a specified area because certain express preconditions were not satisfied, yet use the same legislation to permit an existing licence to be varied to authorise that same activity in that same area without the same preconditions being satisfied.

The substance of the variation application is to authorise aquaculture in areas where aquaculture is not presently authorised.

I therefore consider that the power under s.142 to vary the Licence in the manner applied for may be exercised where the preconditions that would need to be satisfied if a new licence had been applied for are first satisfied.

Accordingly, consideration of the variation application will first give consideration to the issues that would need to be satisfied if the application had been for the grant of a new licence.

Subject to those issues being satisfied, I will proceed to decide the application on its merits.

### 3 RELEVANT ISSUES TO BE SATISFIED

On the basis of the above, the matters in s.92 and s.92A of the Act require consideration.

In connection with this consideration, reference is made to s.246 of the Act and Administrative Guideline No. 1 *Assessment of Applications for Authorisations for Aquaculture and Pearling in Coastal Waters of Western Australia* (“AG 1”).

Consistent with AG 1, a consultation process was undertaken with relevant Government agencies and representative community and industry groups. It included the opportunity for public comment.

Where relevant, those matters arising out of the consultation process that are of greater significance are referred to below.

The matters arising by reason of s.92 and s.92A of the Act are twofold:

1. The criteria specified in s.92(1); and
2. The Management and Environmental Monitoring Plan (“MEMP”).

I will now consider each of these matters.

#### 3.1 Criteria in s.92(1)

Under s.92(1) of the Act, the CEO may grant an aquaculture licence to a person if satisfied of all of the following:

- the person is fit and proper to hold an aquaculture licence;
- the person has, or will have, appropriate tenure over the land or waters on or in which the activities under the licence are to be conducted;
- it is in the better interests of the State and the community to grant the licence;
- the proposed activities are unlikely to adversely affect other fish or the aquatic environment;
- the proposed activities have been approved by other relevant authorities; and
- any other matters prescribed for the purposes of this subsection.

##### ***(a) “Fit and proper person”***

S.92(1)(a) of the Act requires the CEO to be satisfied that a person who has applied for an aquaculture licence is a fit and proper person to hold an aquaculture licence.

The Licence was transferred to AAA on 19 July 2016. AAA has been conducting aquaculture within the Easter Group at the Abrolhos Islands under the authority of that Licence. No circumstance has occurred during that time to question the honesty, knowledge or ability of AAA. This history supports the conclusion that AAA is fit and proper to hold an aquaculture licence to culture the species authorised under the Licence.

Ministerial Policy Guideline No. 19 titled *Matters Of Importance In Respect Of The “Fit And Proper Person” Criterion For Authorisations Under The Fish Resources Management Act 1994* (“MPG 19”) provides a discussion of the types of

considerations relevant to the “fit and proper person” consideration by reference to the key concepts of honesty, knowledge and ability.

MPG 19 sets out two matters of importance: firstly, consideration of the extent to which persons may act on behalf of the licence holder; secondly, the importance of accurate, complete and timely records.

With respect to the matter of persons acting on behalf of the licence holder, AAA is a company and accordingly must act through natural person agents. These persons are the officers (such as directors) and employees of the company. The Licence does not authorise persons to act “on behalf of” AAA, so AAA cannot authorise independent contractors or “lessees” to carry out aquaculture. The director of AAA has been a director of other companies for some years, so can be assumed to understand relevant principles of agency.

The discussion in MPG 19 about the importance of accurate, complete and timely records refers to commercial fisheries and fishing boat operators. The activity authorised by the Licence does not relate to fishing and is therefore not relevant. What is important, however, is the requirement under regulation 64 of the *Fish Resources Management Regulations 1995* (“FRMR”) for the licence holder to keep records and submit returns in respect of the sale of fish and the accurate and timely communication of information relating to disease and biosecurity. Having regard for the MEMP written by AAA, I consider the Company properly understands the significance of accurate, complete and timely provision of relevant information.

I am satisfied that AAA is fit and proper to hold a licence to conduct aquaculture of the authorised species at the proposed hatchery.

**(b) Tenure**

S.92(1)(ba) requires the CEO to be satisfied that a person who has applied for an aquaculture licence has, or will have, appropriate tenure over the land or waters on or in which the activities under the licence are to be conducted.

AAA has an existing lease with the Easter Group Body Corporate over the existing hatchery facility on Rat Island. The hatchery site is in line with the lease arrangements stipulated by the Easter Group Body Corporate. For the authorised offshore site and proposed jetty facility, AAA has made an application for the grant of a lease as per s.97 of the Act. The application is being assessed simultaneously to the application for variation.

Accordingly, I consider that AAA will have appropriate tenure over the proposed jetty facility.

**(c) Better interests**

S.92(1)(b) requires the CEO to be satisfied that the granting of an aquaculture licence to the applicant would be in the better interests of the State and the community.

I consider that the assessment of the “better interests of the State and the community” requires a broad balancing of the benefits against the detriments of the intended aquaculture activities.

This consideration proceeds in the context of the objects of the Act under s.3, which include developing and managing aquaculture in a sustainable way.

The means of achieving this object include:

- ensuring that the impact of aquaculture on the aquatic fauna and their habitats is ecologically sustainable: s.3(2)(b);
- fostering the sustainable development of aquaculture: s.3(2)(d); and
- achieving the optimum economic, social and other benefits from the use of fish resources: s.3(2)(e).

In my view, the issues to consider in respect of the “better interests of the State” relate primarily to positive economic impacts, but also the extent of the regulatory burden that the State will need to carry.

The issues to consider in respect of the “better interests of the community” are more localised although not necessarily limited to the geographically adjacent area. The community will include wild-stock licensed fishers and other aquaculture licence holders.

Aquaculture at the Abrolhos Islands comprises a potentially significant and sustainable sector of Western Australia’s aquaculture industry and has the potential to expand. Aquaculture of the proposed species and the addition of the jetty area will facilitate this expansion. Aquaculture activities provide a significant contribution to economies and food production throughout the world. Aquaculture activities also provide potential growth areas of food production compared to the traditional “fishing of wild stock” activities which are directly extractive of a natural resource.

Sustainable aquaculture projects therefore have the potential to make a significant contribution to the State’s economy and provide community benefits such as employment opportunities and economic diversification in regional areas.

Another benefit is that the proposed activities will provide further experience and scientific information that can assist with future aquaculture proposals. The development of science depends upon ongoing activities to provide information for analysis.

With respect to detriments such as disease and impact on the environment, I consider that these are sufficiently considered below in relation to whether the proposed activities “are unlikely to adversely affect other fish or the environment”. To the extent that fish health certificates and other disease testing are required, being a major element of the biosecurity controls, these are generally to be paid for by AAA.

A consideration which may be seen as a “detriment” is if the Department assumes an unduly onerous regulatory burden. The Department performs a compliance function, to ensure that people comply with the law, in particular licence holders.

Due to the low risk and because the Department must support activities consistent with the objects of the Act, I do not consider that the regulatory burden constitutes a persuasive factor against concluding that the proposed activities are in the better interests of the State.

Another relevant consideration would be whether the proposed waters of operation would be better applied to another use, thereby serving the “better interests” of the State and the community to a greater extent. For example, if an alternative use of the proposed area delivered far greater economic benefits than that may be a reason that it is not in the better interests to authorise the addition of a hatchery.

On balance, by reason of the above considerations I am of the view that the grant of the application would be in the better interests of the State and community.

***(d) Whether the proposed activities are unlikely to adversely affect other fish or the aquatic environment***

S.92(1)(c) requires the CEO to be satisfied that the proposed aquaculture activities are unlikely to adversely affect other fish or the aquatic environment.

The main considerations for this criterion are –

1. Genetics, pests and diseases
2. Aquaculture gear
3. Environmental impact
4. Visual amenity and noise pollution

1. *Genetics, pests and diseases*

FMP 159 considers matters related to genetics and interbreeding for marine aquaculture and stock enhancement and notes that species translocated for aquaculture purposes will usually be genetically different from natural populations; however, the broodstock in this case are non-motile in nature, so the likelihood of escapes is very low. Within the hatchery facility, culture tanks will be drained daily through outlet screens to catch larvae. This water will be filtered through a main trap containing a 50-micron mesh to further prevent larvae escape.

Therefore, I consider the likelihood of escapes can be prevented or minimised through the escape prevention procedures described in the MEMP. The risk of interbreeding is therefore unlikely.

I do not consider the introduction of “marine pests” to be an issue because the proposed operations do not involve introducing seawater from exotic locations to the area or the introduction of any species other than oysters and other native shellfish species to the water.

With respect to disease, there are two scenarios to consider: firstly, that disease may be introduced into the natural environment through oysters that may be carrying the disease; secondly, that a disease outbreak may occur in the oysters at the aquaculture site, caused by the conditions at the site.

*a. Disease introduction*

The accidental introduction of disease pathogens into Western Australia through the translocation of fish can be a major concern, particularly in view of the State's relative freedom from disease. Adequate health testing and certification are consequently an essential element of any translocation policy.

The Western Australian Fishing Industry Council has commented that AAA should attempt to source local broodstock of managed species, such as *Tridacna* and scallops from wild capture licence holders, prior to exploring to collect these species under a Ministerial Exemption. AAA agrees with this request, however depending on its feasibility AAA may still need to apply for an Exemption to collect broodstock.

AAA will be using local broodstock to produce larvae, juveniles and spat for grow-out. The health of broodstock will be monitored and stock will be cleaned prior to leaving the farm, to remove large or hard fouling organisms and rinsed before entering the jetty or hatchery facility. AAA will operate under biosecurity controls imposed through licence conditions and a MEMP. These controls are based on the requirement to demonstrate low risk of disease introduction and spread through conducting comprehensive health testing prior to movements being permitted.

I consider the threat of disease being introduced to the Abrolhos Island and the surrounding areas generally to be low, given the biosecurity protocols in place and the controls imposed, or that may be imposed, over the movement of the fish to the site.

*b. Disease development in situ*

I have noted that aquaculture has been carried out at the existing site at Easter Group for over 17 years. In that time, there have been no reported disease incidents.

I am also mindful of the disease management requirements set out in the Management Policy, which include disease incident reporting requirements. The Management Policy forms part of the MEMP, compliance with which is a requirement under the Act.

## *2. Aquaculture gear*

There are two aspects to the consideration of the effect of aquaculture gear on other fish or the environment: its physical and spatial impact on benthic habitats (that is, its “footprint”); and failure to remove the aquaculture gear if the aquaculture operation ceases. The environmental impact of the aquaculture activity on benthic habitats and water quality is a separate issue that is dealt with below.

### *a. Impact of the aquaculture gear*

In this case, the proposed jetty site will provide the logistical link between the land-based hatchery facility and the offshore aquaculture facility.

Therefore, I consider that there would be minimal environmental impact arising from the use of the described facility.

### *b. Removal of the aquaculture gear*

In the event of aquaculture ceasing, any issues concerning the clean-up and rehabilitation of the site are covered in the lease deed and legislation.

In regard of the marine site, the lease deed will address the matter of a financial security for the jetty facility and marine site.

## *3. Environmental impact*

I note that it is in the best commercial interest of AAA to maintain a healthy environment and to ensure any ongoing environmental impact is adequately measured and evaluated. The monitoring and management of environmental factors is a separate issue that is dealt with in the MEMP section below.

I have noted that the species selected for production and culture will be filter-feeders that are endemic to the Abrolhos Islands and require no additional feeding. I conclude the oyster species will have minimal impact on the surrounding environment as there will be no increase in nutrient levels; however, to ensure that the water quality remains high, monitoring sites will be established to record seawater quality parameters identified in the MEMP. In addition, AAA will only culture species reared from broodstock that occur naturally within the Abrolhos Islands to assure that no introduction of exotic species is made to the natural marine ecosystem. This is covered in the MEMP.

I have noted that the Abrolhos Islands is recognised for its significant marine and terrestrial fauna and flora; however, the risk of the proposed aquaculture activity having any significant impact on the environment is considered low and can be managed through the requirements of the MEMP.

The Conservation Council has commented that AAA should contain seepage from the hatchery outflow to within the Body Corporate boundary as well as ensure that no bright lights are used on the jetty of buildings. In addition, the Conservation Council requests that the proponent positions all aquaculture gear more than one

metre below low tide sea level, to prevent Pacific gulls from preying on the stock. AAA has addressed matters of hatchery outflow, hatchery lights and longline culture in the MEMP.

Therefore, I consider that the matter of environmental impact has been fully addressed and sufficient environmental monitoring and management controls provided in the MEMP and conditions of the Licence.

#### *4. Visual amenity and noise pollution*

I have noted the location of the hatchery and the remote location of the site; the proposed project will not have any negative impact on visual amenity and will not result in any noise pollution.

After considering the relevant issues regarding s.92(1)(c), I am satisfied the proposed activities are unlikely to affect other fish or the aquatic environment and can be managed through the MEMP and conditions imposed on the licence under s.95 of the Act.

#### ***(e) Whether the proposed activities have been approved by other relevant authorities***

S.92(1)(d) requires the CEO to be satisfied that the proposed activities have been approved by relevant authorities. I have not identified any other relevant authority that needs to provide approval.

#### ***(f) Other matters prescribed***

S.92(1)(e) requires the CEO to be satisfied of any other matters prescribed for the purposes of s.92(1). There are no other prescribed matters.

Therefore, I am satisfied of all of the criteria in s.92(1) of the Act, in respect of the variation application.

### **3.2 The MEMP**

Section 92A of the Act requires an applicant to lodge a MEMP when lodging an application for an aquaculture licence.

A MEMP forms part of an integrated management framework for aquaculture activities, which also includes relevant legislative requirements (including the FRMR and the *Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007*) as well as conditions on licences and leases.

The purpose of a MEMP is to satisfy the CEO that any risks to the environment and public safety will be managed per s.92A(1) of the Act. A MEMP provides information on the background and purpose of the aquaculture activity, including its objectives, other information such as the species of fish to be farmed, the location of the site and the farming method, and details of environmental monitoring and management and biosecurity.

With reference to the provisions of s.92A of the Act and the Guidance Statement, I note that MEMPs generally contain requirements in respect of the following.

1. An overview of the aquaculture operation, including information on species and quantity of fish; location and areas of land or waters; and farming methods and aquaculture gear.
2. Environmental Management and Monitoring, including information on and details of baseline information; environmental monitoring parameters; the environmental monitoring program; and response thresholds and response protocols.
3. Impact on protected species and other aquatic fauna.
4. Biosecurity, including information on and details of general facility information; administrative biosecurity procedures; operational biosecurity procedures; and biosecurity incident and emergency procedures.

AAA has submitted a MEMP in respect of its existing licence. That MEMP has been amended to apply to the proposed operations.

As such, I approve the MEMP provided by AAA (**Attachment 4**).

In respect of the public availability of the MEMP, I note that under s.250(1)(c) of the Act, a MEMP lodged under the Act is “confidential information” and cannot be divulged by the Department.

#### **4 DISCRETION TO VARY – MERITS OF THE APPLICATION**

Section 142(1)(a) of the Act provides that an authorisation may be varied where the holder of the authorisation has applied for the variation.

I am satisfied that the power to vary AAA’s Licence exists in this case.

S.56 of the *Interpretation Act 1984* provides that where the word “may” is used in conferring a power, then the word shall, unless the contrary intention appears in the Act, be interpreted to imply that the power may be exercised or not, at discretion.

I do not consider a “contrary intention” exists in the Act. Accordingly, I am required to consider whether to exercise the power or not, at discretion.

In considering the exercise of discretion I give regard to the merits of the application. That requires balancing the opposing considerations against the supporting considerations. For any detrimental factors, I give regard to how detriments may be minimised and controlled.

#### **4.1 Potential disadvantages of variation**

The potential disadvantages of the proposed variation are:

- (a) Biosecurity (genetics and disease risk)
- (b) Environmental impact
- (c) Impact on compliance and resourcing
- (d) Limitation on access to the proposed waters
- (e) Impact on navigation
- (f) Impact on recreational fishing
- (g) Impact on commercial fishing and other commercial activities including tourism

##### **(a) Biosecurity**

I have considered the issue of genetics earlier at part 3.1(d)(2) of this decision, including interbreeding, and concluded genetic issues will be unlikely to have any detrimental impact.

The potential consequences of a disease outbreak include potentially serious economic impacts on the wild-stock and recreational fishers, as well as a consequential impact on the aquatic ecosystem generally; there is unlikely to be any potential impact on the pearling sector or other aquaculture licence holders.

Once present in the water column and under suitable conditions, disease-causing organisms have the ability to spread; therefore, if a disease outbreak occurs and pathogens are released into the water, it is generally difficult to control or treat the disease, which generally has to run its natural course. Biosecurity controls are therefore needed to prevent the introduction of pathogens into the environment and to minimise the risk of diseases developing at the site by not permitting operations to be conducted so as to predispose organisms on the site to develop disease (by preventing or minimising predisposing factors).

I have considered the issue of disease introduction earlier at part 3.1(d)(1) of this decision and concluded sufficient controls will be in place and that this issue will be unlikely to have any detrimental impact.

There can also be a requirement for disease testing on stock held in the marine farm. This approach ensures a high level of confidence in the ability to detect known disease agents.

I am aware that there have been no reported disease events in the oysters grown at the AAA site at the Abrolhos Islands. I note that from time to time the Principal Research Scientist Aquaculture and Fish Health may wish to undertake disease testing in the absence of a reported disease event and that these requirements may change from time to time, taking into account the diseases of interest, the characteristics of the tests available and the required confidence in the result as determined by a risk assessment. A licence condition will be imposed to enable the Principal Research Aquaculture and Scientist Fish Health to determine these requirements for disease testing.

Given the biosecurity protocols in place for the land-based hatchery facility and the controls imposed, or that may be imposed, over the movement of the proposed species, I consider the threat of disease being introduced to the Abrolhos Islands is low.

In respect of the proposed species, I note that any movements to the site will require a translocation authorisation, which would deal with matters including disease. I consider the threat of disease being introduced to the Abrolhos Islands by the proposed species is low.

To address the risk of disease development *in situ*, additional testing of the proposed species at the farm site at the Abrolhos Islands can be required through a licence condition.

In summary, I have noted the issue cannot be about eliminating all risk; otherwise, aquaculture operations in the marine environment would not be able to proceed. That is contrary to the object and operation of the Act. The task, therefore, is to reduce the risk of disease outbreak to an appropriately low level by identifying and assessing biosecurity, environmental and other risks and implementing management strategies and controls to reduce the risks. This is addressed primarily through biosecurity controls implemented in the MEMP and licence conditions.

#### ***(b) Environmental impact***

The MEMP provides an environmental monitoring program developed to ensure the proposed aquaculture activity will be unlikely to have any significant impact on the environment and that any impacts that may occur will be managed effectively.

Given the information provided in the MEMP, I am of the view that the proposed aquaculture activity could be implemented without significant deleterious impacts on the environment. Existing aquaculture legislation and adaptive management mechanisms provide further confidence that the aquaculture industry can be developed sustainably.

Given the information set out above, I am of the view there are sufficient controls in place to manage any environmental impact

#### ***(c) Impact on compliance and resourcing***

I note that licence conditions are generally designed to facilitate efficient and effective enforcement activities and that disease testing of cultured stock is generally the financial responsibility of the operators. Therefore, I do not consider that compliance activities undertaken to enforce the varied licence conditions in this case will be unduly onerous, as they should fall within the usual activities of the Department.

#### ***(d) Whether the proposal involves limitation on access to the proposed waters.***

The variation is for the addition of species and a land-based site so the additional area will not limit access to waters.

***(e) The possible impact on navigation***

The Department referred the proposal to the Department of Transport (Navigational Safety), it advised that no marking or lighting is required for the proposed jetty facility.

***(f) The possible impact on recreational fishing***

The variation is for the addition of species and a jetty facility so the additional area will not have any impact on recreational fishing.

***(g) The possible impact on commercial fishing and other commercial activities including tourism***

The variation is for the addition of species and a jetty facility so, as with recreational fishing, the additional area will not have any impact on commercial fishing.

**4.2 Potential advantages of variation**

The potential advantages of the proposed variation are:

- (a) Suitability of the location for aquaculture and proximity to existing operation
- (b) Very low impact on other users of the resource
- (c) Potential economic benefits for the State
- (d) Contribution to ongoing development of science and knowledge of aquaculture
- (e) No impact on native title.

***(a) Suitability of the location for aquaculture and proximity to existing operation***

Correct site selection is the single most important factor that determines the success of aquaculture ventures. The history of successful oyster aquaculture at AAA's existing site at the Abrolhos Islands indicates the suitability of the site for aquaculture. In its application, AAA has provided justification for the additional area applied for under the variation and confirmed its need to expand its current operation to include various species and a jetty facility to make the venture more commercially viable.

There are numerous reasons why the site provides a good location for the proposed activity and, specifically, I have noted the following factors in respect of the location of the site:

- the physical features of the site satisfy the biological requirements for the production of the proposed species;
- the proximity of the jetty facility to the existing area provides an added advantage in respect of operational efficiency and compliance activity; and
- the jetty facility will provide the logistical link between the land-based hatchery facility and the offshore site.

I am of the view the reasons set out above show that the location is suitable for the aquaculture of the proposed species, and that the addition of the new area to the existing site would afford advantages in respect of operational efficiency.

***(b) Very low impact on other users of the resource (providing disease issues are dealt with)***

For the reasons set out above, the granting of the variation to the Licence would not have any impact on other users of the resource.

The proposal has no impact on visual amenity and noise pollution.

I have noted that the proposal was developed in consultation with a range of stakeholders.

Providing that disease issues are dealt with, I have formed the view that the proposal will have little to no impact on other users of the resource.

***(c) Potential economic benefits for the State***

The establishment of aquaculture operations in regional areas has the potential to add to the economic growth of the region and increase local employment. Existing aquaculture farms around the State are already providing employment opportunities.

I have considered the issue of economic benefits for the State earlier at part 3.1(c) of this decision.

***(d) Contribution to ongoing development of science and knowledge of aquaculture***

Information generated from the expansion of aquaculture activities at the site would contribute to the ongoing development of the science and knowledge about aquaculture, in part by providing data pertaining to environmental impact of activities of this nature on the key identified environmental factors at this type of site; namely, benthic communities and habitat, marine environmental quality and marine fauna.

The science developed from the proposal would not only increase the efficiency of the commercial activity, but also provide a basis for adaptive management by the Department.

***(e) No impact on native title***

The proposal was referred to the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage, which advised that the proposal does not impact any known aboriginal heritage sites within the area of proposal. Consequently, this application to vary an aquaculture licence has no impact on Native Title.

In respect of the various issues opposing and in favour of the proposal, I am satisfied the benefits outweigh the disadvantages and that the risks, possible detriments and

other issues associated with the proposed licence variation can be managed by licence conditions and the MEMP.

## **5 LICENCE CONDITIONS**

My reasoning has noted that certain matters can be satisfied if they are able to be dealt with by licence conditions. Accordingly, before deciding on the application to vary AAA's licence, I now turn my mind to conditions I consider ought to be imposed on the licence.

The matters for which conditions may be considered are as follows.

- Requirement for a lease

A lease will be required for aquaculture to be conducted at the site.

- Aquaculture method and gear

Conditions in respect of aquaculture method and gear provide controls over the deployment of sea cages, the materials used in their manufacture and anchoring systems. These controls are set out in the Management Policy, compliance with which is a requirement of the MEMP.

- Health management and certification

Conditions dealing with health management and certification will minimise the risk of introduction of disease, by ensuring each group of fish moved to the site will be tested and certified free of signs of clinical disease.

A general condition will also be imposed requiring information on mortalities to be provided at the request of the Principal Research Scientist Aquaculture and Fish Health.

- Biosecurity (including disease and genetics)

Conditions in respect of biosecurity include controls over record keeping, the source of broodstock, health management and certification, procedures to be followed in the event of suspicion of disease and controls over the disposal of biological waste materials.

As AAA would not have exclusive possession of the site and waters, an officer of the Aquaculture and Fish Health Section of the Department or a Fisheries Management Officer can enter the site at any time to inspect stocks.

I note that with disease testing a balance needs to be struck between the benefit derived from testing against the cost of undertaking the testing. Repeated testing of healthy stock is likely to be of low value, yet would require the licence holder to incur significant costs. On the other hand, targeted testing of dead or moribund species will be likely to identify the presence of any disease-causing organisms.

A level of testing should be undertaken on the recommendation of the Principal Research Scientist Aquaculture and Fish Health.

As with any condition, if circumstances change then the requirement for testing can be changed.

- Marking and lighting
- Environmental monitoring

Conditions in respect of environmental monitoring and reporting are set out in the MEMP.

- Compliance issues

Conditions in respect of compliance issues provide controls over or requirements for making and keeping of records.

The power to delete and add new conditions is provided for in s.95 of the Act.

The Department has liaised with the Applicant over the licence conditions. The indicative (intended) substance of the licence conditions is as follows.

## 1. Interpretation

(1) In the conditions on this licence –

***Pathologist*** means an employee of a laboratory facility that is accredited by the National Association of Testing Authorities, Australia;

***Principal Research Scientist Aquaculture and Fish Health*** means the officer occupying that position in the Department, or any officer occupying a comparable position in the Department that the CEO advises the licence holder by notice in writing will be performing the duties of the Principal Research Scientist Aquaculture and Fish Health;

***site*** means the area specified in Schedule 2 of this licence.

(2) The following terms used in the conditions on this licence have the same meaning as in the *Fish Resources Management Act 1994* –

- aquaculture lease;
- CEO;
- Department;
- record.

## 2. Requirement for appropriate tenure to authorise activity

The holder of this licence must make every reasonable endeavour to obtain, and must maintain in force at all times, the legal right to use the site. No

aquaculture is to be carried on at the site without the legal right to use the site for aquaculture having first been granted.

### **3. Marking and Lighting**

- (1) Marking and lighting of the offshore site must be installed and maintained in accordance with Category 2 as set out in the document “Guidance Statement for Evaluating and Determining Categories of Marking and Lighting for Aquaculture and Pearling Leases/ Licences (2010)”.
- (2) The marking and lighting required under paragraph (1) must be installed before any aquaculture activity is undertaken at the site.

### **4. Aquaculture gear**

- (1) Aquaculture gear must be used in such a way that it is not in contact with and does not damage any reef, coral or seagrass bed.
- (2) The holder of the licence must ensure that all aquaculture gear is located within the boundaries of the site, and maintained in a safe, secure and seaworthy condition; and all floating aquaculture gear, including ropes and buoys, must be fastened securely.

### **5. Jetties**

No aquaculture activity is to be conducted on or above any jetty unless the jetty has been assessed by a qualified structural engineer, and the engineer has issued a certificate specifying the working load limit of the jetty. No aquaculture activity is to be conducted on or above any jetty unless a copy of the working load limit certificate is kept at the jetty for inspection at any time by any Fisheries and Marine Officer and the working load limit specified in the certificate is not being exceeded. The original certificate must be kept safe and secure as a record of compliance with this condition.

### **6. Possession of fish and translocation**

Any fish that is not native to the Abrolhos Islands must not be brought onto or kept on the site.

### **7. Waste**

Where any person has, or the CEO advises the licence holder in writing (including by email) that the CEO has, reasonable grounds for suspecting that

–

- (1) A disease to which regulation 69 (d) relates is confirmed in any tank, cage or enclosure at the site; or
- (2) There is a real and sensible risk of disease being spread to the oceanic waters or stock in those waters through the discharge of waters from the tank or tanks,

then no waters are to be discharged from the tank, cage or enclosure, either directly or indirectly, to any oceanic waters or other natural waters.

## **8. Health management and certification**

- (1) The licence holder must not move fish onto the site unless –
  - (a) the licence holder has submitted the request form, provided by the Principal Research Scientist Aquaculture and Fish Health, to a Pathologist employed by the Department for the provision of a health certificate; and
  - (b) the licence holder has received a health certificate from a Pathologist in respect of all fish being moved to the site; or
  - (c) where the licence holder has made a request under paragraph (a) to a Pathologist who is not an officer of the Department, the licence holder has received confirmation from the Principal Research Scientist Aquaculture and Fish Health that a copy of a health certificate for those fish is in the possession of the Principal Research Scientist Aquaculture and Fish Health.
- (2) The licence holder must ensure that any fish moved to the site is accompanied at all times by a copy of the health certificate received under paragraph (1).
- (3) Paragraphs (1) and (2) do not apply with respect to broodstock collected or taken from the waters of the Abrolhos Islands Fish Habitat Protection Area.

## **9. Disease testing**

- (1) The licence holder must ensure that disease testing of fish is carried out –
  - (a) prior to transport to or from the site; or
  - (b) while the fish is situated at the site,as required by notice in writing from the Principal Research Scientist Aquaculture and Fish Health.
- (2) The testing carried out under paragraph (1) will be at the cost of the licence holder.

## **10. Biosecurity measures**

Where the licence holder -

- (1) suspects that any fish at the site are affected by disease; or

- (2) becomes aware of any significant or unusually high levels of fish mortality, caused by disease or otherwise, the licence holder must -
  - (a) immediately notify the Department on 1300 278 292 (all hours) of the level of mortality or signs of disease; and
  - (b) follow the directions of the Principal Research Scientist Aquaculture and Fish Health in relation to providing reports, samples of fish, or any other relevant item, at such a time as required.

## **11. Interaction with protected species**

Any interactions between any aquaculture gear at the site and any protected species, including entangled or stranded animals, must be immediately reported to the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attraction's Wildcare Hotline on (08) 9474 9055 (24-hour emergency number), the DBCA's Nature Protection Branch on (08) 9219 9837 and the local DBCA District Office.

## **12. Record keeping**

- (1) The licence holder must make accurate and timely records of –
  - (a) the aquaculture gear used at the site;
  - (b) the movement of fish to each type of aquaculture gear, including –
    - i. the estimated average weight and numbers of the fish moved;
    - ii. the time and date the movement took place; and
    - iii. any mortalities of fish that occurred during the movement;
  - (c) the estimated weight and numbers of fish being kept on each type of gear at the site;
  - (d) the estimated weight and numbers of fish harvested from each type of aquaculture gear at the site;
  - (e) all mortalities at the site, both in total and as a percentage of total stock held at the site at the time; and
  - (f) all health certificates issued to the licence holder by a Pathologist.
- (2) The licence holder must keep the records made under paragraph (1) in a secure place at the licence holder's registered place of business for a period of seven years.
- (3) Records under paragraph (1) must be available to an authorised Fisheries Officer at any time

## **13. MEMP Compliance Audit**

An independent audit of compliance with the MEMP must be commissioned and carried out by the licence holder, at the expense of the licence holder, within four months of being directed in writing by the CEO to commission the

audit. A copy of any interim and final audit report must be delivered to the CEO within seven days of being received by the licence holder.

#### **14. MEMP Report**

The holder of the licence must:

- (1) at all times comply with and implement the latest Management and Environmental Monitoring Plan (“MEMP”) prepared by the holder of the licence, and delivered to the Department; and
- (2) before 31 July each year, submit to the CEO at the head office of the Department at Perth, a written annual report on its activities conducted under the MEMP during the year, which must include all results of management and monitoring activities to 1 July.

The conditions will be imposed by providing the Applicant with notice in writing, noting there is a requirement for a review period before giving effect to the decision.

I note that the aquaculture venture is a dynamic operation, not a static event, and in the event that varied or additional conditions become appropriate then those can be imposed in the future in accordance with the process in the Act.

## DECISION

On the basis of the above and subject to the amendment of the licence by imposing conditions referred to above, I have decided to vary the Aquaculture Licence No. 1574, submitted by Abrolhos Aquaculture Australia Pty Ltd to include a jetty facility on Rat Island as well as the species of scallops, clams, oysters, sponges, sea urchins and sea cucumbers.

I have also decided to approve the MEMP and delete the existing conditions on the Licence and impose new conditions on the Licence under s.95 of the Act. The new conditions to be imposed are as set out above at part 5 of this statement of decision.



Heather Brayford

**DEPUTY DIRECTOR GENERAL, Sustainability and Biosecurity**

As delegate of the CEO

Dated this 25<sup>th</sup> day of January 2019

I hereby give instruction for notice of the decision to vary the Licence under s.142 of the Act and impose conditions under s.95 of the Act to be advertised in the West Australian newspaper in accordance with s.148 of the *Fish Resources Management Act* 1994

# HOUTMAN ABROLHOS ABROLHOS AQUACULTURE AUSTRALIA PTY LTD AQUACULTURE LICENCE - SITE PLAN

ALL THAT PORTION OF TERRITORIAL WATER WITHIN THE BOUNDARY DESCRIBED AND COLOURED GREEN ON THE PLAN BELOW COMPRISING A TOTAL AREA OF 0.887 SQUARE NAUTICAL MILES

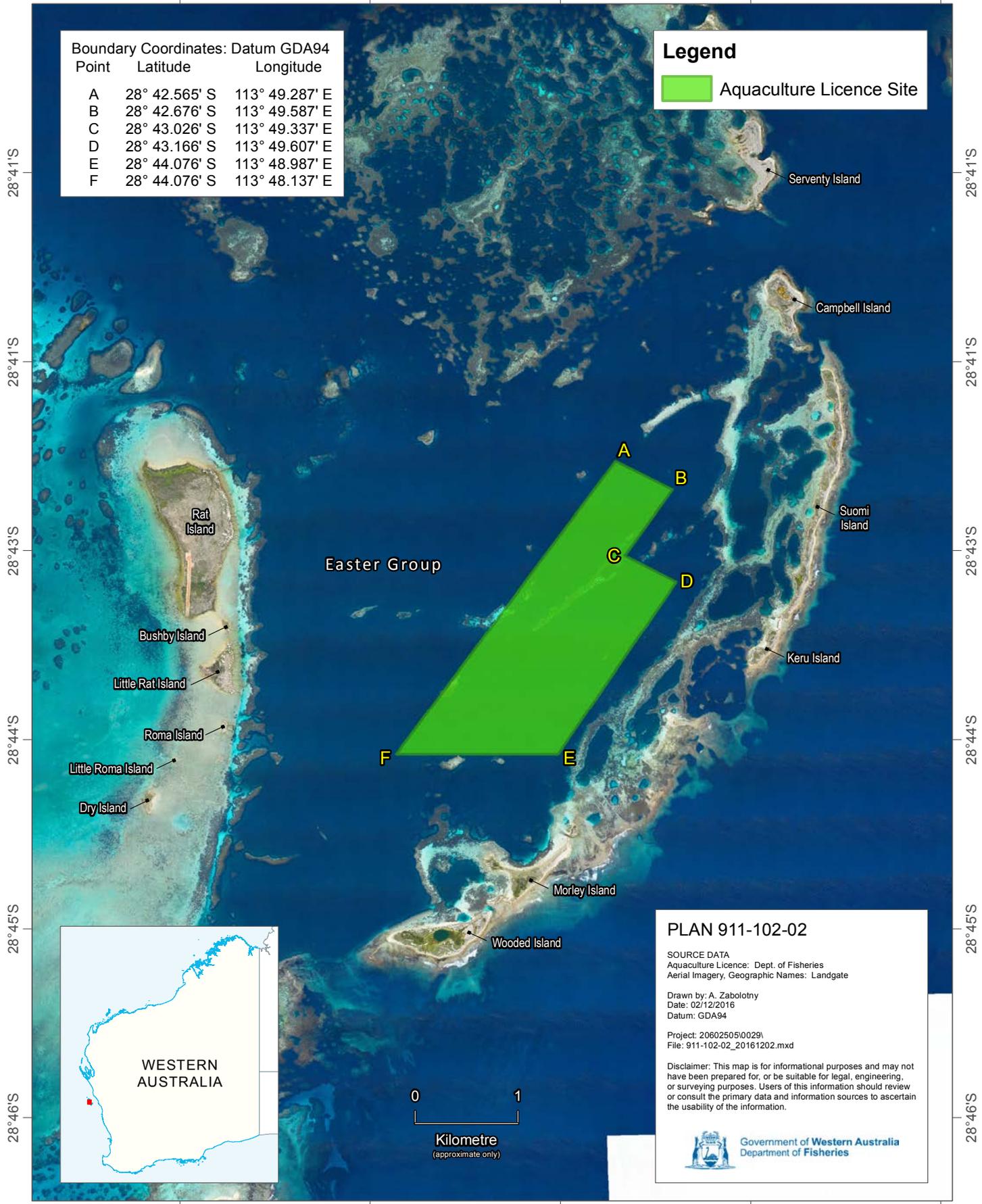
113°47'E                      113°48'E                      113°49'E                      113°50'E                      113°51'E

Boundary Coordinates: Datum GDA94

Point	Latitude	Longitude
A	28° 42.565' S	113° 49.287' E
B	28° 42.676' S	113° 49.587' E
C	28° 43.026' S	113° 49.337' E
D	28° 43.166' S	113° 49.607' E
E	28° 44.076' S	113° 48.987' E
F	28° 44.076' S	113° 48.137' E

**Legend**

Aquaculture Licence Site



28°41'S  
28°41'S  
28°43'S  
28°44'S  
28°45'S  
28°46'S

28°41'S  
28°41'S  
28°43'S  
28°44'S  
28°45'S  
28°46'S



**PLAN 911-102-02**

SOURCE DATA  
 Aquaculture Licence: Dept. of Fisheries  
 Aerial Imagery, Geographic Names: Landgate

Drawn by: A. Zabolotny  
 Date: 02/12/2016  
 Datum: GDA94

Project: 20602505\0029\  
 File: 911-102-02\_20161202.mxd

Disclaimer: This map is for informational purposes and may not have been prepared for, or be suitable for legal, engineering, or surveying purposes. Users of this information should review or consult the primary data and information sources to ascertain the usability of the information.

113°47'E                      113°48'E                      113°49'E                      113°50'E                      113°51'E

# HOUTMAN ABROLHOS

## ABROLHOS AQUACULTURE AUSTRALIA PTY LTD

### AQUACULTURE LICENCE - SITE PLAN

ALL THAT PORTION OF TERRITORIAL LAND AND WATER WITHIN THE BOUNDARY DESCRIBED AND COLOURED GREEN ON THE PLAN BELOW COMPRISING A TOTAL AREA OF 0.121 HECTARES

113°47'20"E

28°42'50"S

28°42'50"S

28°43'0"S

28°43'0"S

**Boundary Coordinates: Datum GDA94**

Point      Latitude      Longitude

**Hatchery**

1	28° 42.966' S	113° 47.216' E
2	28° 42.969' S	113° 47.223' E
16	28° 42.975' S	113° 47.220' E
17	28° 42.972' S	113° 47.213' E

**Pipe easement**

2	28° 42.969' S	113° 47.223' E
3	28° 42.971' S	113° 47.239' E
4	28° 42.970' S	113° 47.247' E
13	28° 42.971' S	113° 47.246' E
14	28° 42.973' S	113° 47.239' E
15	28° 42.970' S	113° 47.222' E

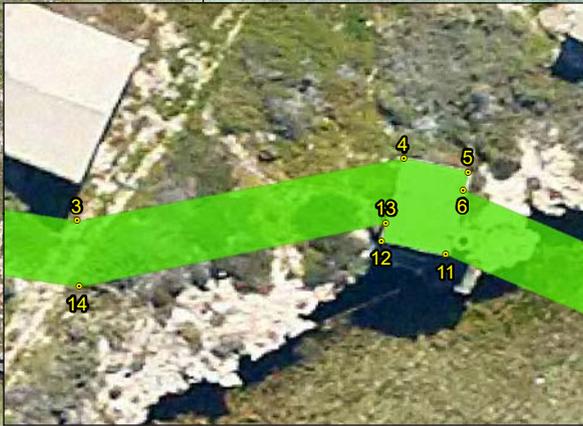
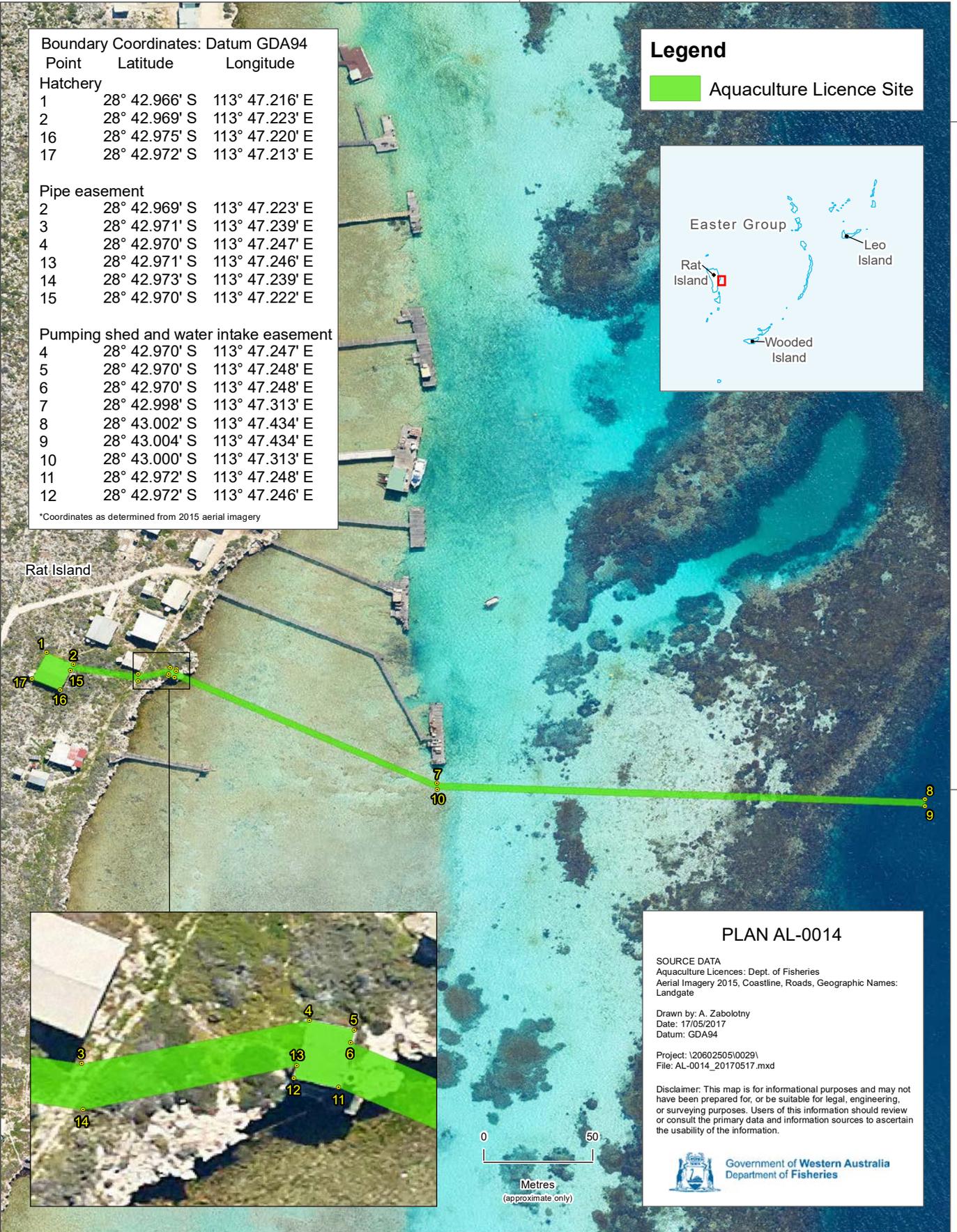
**Pumping shed and water intake easement**

4	28° 42.970' S	113° 47.247' E
5	28° 42.970' S	113° 47.248' E
6	28° 42.970' S	113° 47.248' E
7	28° 42.998' S	113° 47.313' E
8	28° 43.002' S	113° 47.434' E
9	28° 43.004' S	113° 47.434' E
10	28° 43.000' S	113° 47.313' E
11	28° 42.972' S	113° 47.248' E
12	28° 42.972' S	113° 47.246' E

\*Coordinates as determined from 2015 aerial imagery

**Legend**

Aquaculture Licence Site



**PLAN AL-0014**

**SOURCE DATA**  
 Aquaculture Licences: Dept. of Fisheries  
 Aerial Imagery 2015, Coastline, Roads, Geographic Names:  
 Landgate

Drawn by: A. Zabolotny  
 Date: 17/05/2017  
 Datum: GDA94

Project: \20602505\0029\  
 File: AL-0014\_20170517.mxd

Disclaimer: This map is for informational purposes and may not have been prepared for, or be suitable for legal, engineering, or surveying purposes. Users of this information should review or consult the primary data and information sources to ascertain the usability of the information.



**Government of Western Australia**  
 Department of Fisheries

113°47'20"E

# HOUTMAN ABROLHOS - RAT ISLAND ABROLHOS AQUACULTURE AUSTRALIA PTY LTD AQUACULTURE LICENCE - SITE PLAN

ALL THAT PORTION OF LAND AND WATER WITHIN THE BOUNDARY DESCRIBED AND COLOURED GREEN ON THE PLAN BELOW COMPRISING A TOTAL AREA OF 327 SQUARE METRES

