shellfish culture

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SCL nursery crew preparing posts for rack expansion

THE CHAIRMAN:

Breeding strategy to beat POMS

Shellfish Culture (SCL) is working on a ten year strategy for an integrated breeding program which will take into consideration industry partners such as ASI and challenges facing our industry such as POMS (Pacific Oyster Mortality Syndrome).

Chairman, Greg Goodman

Chairman of SCL, Greg Goodman, says the shellfish industry needs to come to an agreement on a strategic breeding program that will bring together all participants including the major hatcheries, ASI, and government agencies.

"It is imperative that agreement is reached in this area to ensure the industry has a strategy to deal with POMS and to ensure the genetic structure of breeding stock within the industry is sound and meets customer needs.

"There are some very important meetings in the coming months to address this and put the industry on the one page in terms of its breeding program," said Mr Goodman.

"Complementing this vision, SCL is developing a 10 year breeding program that our Board proposes to adopt by the end of this financial year.

"We're also delighted to have one of the world's leading experts, Dr Standish Allen of the Virginia Institute of Marine Science in the USA, working with us over the past three months on his Sabbatical in Australia, and it is very important to have his input on breeding programs globally and where the market sits in general across the world," said Mr Goodman

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Shellfish Culture TASMANIA

Shellfish Culture Limited
290 Bicheno Street, Clifton Beach, Tasmania, Australia 7020
Telephone: (03) 6248 9441 **Int Telephone:** +61 3 6248 9441
Fax: (03) 6248 9761 **Int Fax:** +61 3 6248 9761
Email: info@shellfishculture.com.au
Website: www.shellfishculture.com.au

Andy Day, SCL hatchery technician and Dr Standish Allen checking new tetraploid breeding lines

Breeding stock research at SCL

Shellfish Culture (SCL) has embarked on a program to develop superior tetraploid breeding stock for its spawnless oysters. "We're good at what we do, but we're always striving to get better," says SCL General Manager Kerry Wells.

As mentioned elsewhere in this newsletter, a world leader in the field, Dr Standish Allen, is working at SCL's Research and Development centre at Pipeclay Lagoon with funding from SCL and the and the Australian Seafood Cooperative Research Centre to assist SCL to improve the genetics of its breeding stock so that SCL has better parents to breed spawnless oysters.

The aim, says Kerry Wells, is to develop breeding stock that is more stress tolerant and disease resistant.

Dr Allen is professor and director of the Aquaculture Genetics and Breeding Technology Centre at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science in the USA. . He is also Chief Technical Adviser for 4Cs Breeding Technologies Inc.

"Investment in improving tetraploid breeding stock technology is happening in only a few places in the world. Shellfish Culture has certainly become one of the world's leaders in the development of this technology."

Farm Expansion Update

After acquiring a large marine farm lease in Pipeclay Lagoon last year, SCL is ahead of schedule in its upgrading of the asset. Ultimately this will mean more product and new product ranges for customers.

Rack building is proceeding speedily, and SCL expects to start stage two of the rack building process this financial year rather than next, as originally expected. " This will assist us to strengthen our over winter stock and also boost our spring market, as well as increasing the pace of development of new products," says Kerry Wells, SCL's General Manager.

"Our farm operations crew are doing a great job with the rack building. We've so far built eight new 150 metre quad lines, which increases by 5,000 the number of Seapa baskets on farm, with the capacity to hold another 45-50 million oysters to grow out to meet our larger oyster product range."

Oyster graders have now been re-located to the farm, and water tanks have been installed for the supply of water to the graders. Kerry Wells say the grading system adopted at the farm is gentler on the oysters, reduces mortality and stress, and allows for quicker recovery for growth in the water.

Top: Rack building progress on new farm; Above: Installation of new water tanks at new farm facility

PLOGA Group

Pipeclay Lagoon is the location of a number of oyster farms, and the Pipeclay Lagoon Oyster Growers Association (PLOGA) is taking a very active role in ensuring a clean local environment.

An untidy environment can occur because of the presence of feral Pacific oysters – a frequent occurrence around oyster farms, and PLOGA has established a stepped-up program of clean ups. In the past, four to five clean-ups of Pipeclay Lagoon would occur each year. Now the pace is being increased to 12 organised clean ups of the waterway over a year.

"We want a pristine waterway – not just for our growing oysters – but for the recreational users of Pipeclay Lagoon as well, such as wind surfers and recreational fishers," says Kerry Wells, General Manager of SCL.

In preparation for the summer holiday season, PLOGA members have been working together on almost weekly clean-ups of the Lagoon.

The latest clean-up underway in Pipeclay Lagoon

Upgrading Pipeclay Lagoon

Spat production is being increased at SCL's headquarters at Pipeclay Lagoon in southern Tasmania.

Scott Parkinson, SCL's Breeding Manager is in charge of the production of hundreds of millions of oyster spat each year at Pipeclay Lagoon. His land based nursery, where spat is grown in bottles, is being transferred from the green house to the former grading room which was recently vacated by the marine farm crew to their new farm operations about a kilometre away in Pipeclay Lagoon.

The new nursery area will enable SCL to double spat bottle capacity. The main business benefits for the expansion include.

1. Operating at 75% capacity always providing contingency when production peaks.
2. Improved spat health and biosecurity through equipment dry out and batch separation by having eight separate 30 bottle spat systems.
3. Stock security with alarm monitored and secure building.
4. Increase recoveries through stock control and increased water heating capacity.
5. Increased food production by 30%.

"All this means we can grow more healthy spat to meet industry demand," says Scott.

Energy efficiency is also being maximised in the three heating units which maintain optimal water temperature levels for the growing spat. Variable speed pumps are being installed which slow the pump motor of the heating units down to run at half speed, providing a power cost reduction of 75%.

At the same time a mezzanine level has been built so that the heating units can take full advantage of the sun. They've been lifted off the ground where they were often in shadow in winter time to a level where the heating units can be assisted by the natural warmth of the sun.

Trading in SCL shares

The Board of Shellfish Culture Ltd has agreed to improve the process of trading in SCL shares with a central register where both buyers and sellers can record their interest.

The Company Secretary will maintain the share register of prospective sellers and buyers. Anyone wishing to sell can register through the Company Secretary. On receipt of advice of an intention to sell, the Company Secretary will communicate through this quarterly newsletter to all shareholders.

Negotiations will be undertaken directly between the shareholder and potential purchasers. If requested, the Company Secretary can provide details of the last sale price, and the net asset backing of shares as at the last annual accounts.

The Board welcomes any feedback on this new system, and suggestions for further ways to improve the process.

The Company Secretary is available on email at secretary@shellfishculture.com.au or phone 0488 796 555.

OUR PEOPLE:

New team member

Kyla Stalker has joined Shellfish Culture as an administrative assistant.

Kyla is learning about the financial side of the business and is studying for a Certificate 3 in Business. "I was first introduced to business administration through managing cafes and my involvement in other retail business operations."

Kyla has been on a steep learning curve about the shellfish industry. "It's a very interesting industry and before I joined it I didn't realise how oysters grew from such tiny spat into the delicious food we eat in restaurants, and that there are different oysters such as standards and spawnless."

Kyla works at SCL's headquarters at Pipe Clay Lagoon and lives locally in the busy community of Sorell. As to her leisure time when she's not working she says she has two definite priorities: shopping and sleeping!

CUSTOMER PROFILE:

Geoff Diemar

Geoff Diemar's family has farmed oysters in the Port Stephens area of NSW since the 1880's.

What began as a fishing and oystering business is today predominantly an oyster nursery with a small farm covering about 9ha as complementary to the core business. "What's surplus to our customers' needs grows out on our own farm and is sold commercially in Newcastle and Sydney," says Geoff Diemar, fourth generation oyster grower.

"Our family have always been innovators in this industry", says Geoff. "For instance from vertical to horizontal culture methods, we were successful with inter-estuary farming in the 1950's. We'd grow our oysters for a while in one estuary and then transfer them to another for the last eight or so months of their growing period. We found that it gave our oysters a tremendous boost."

Geoff has been a customer of Shellfish Culture since the 1990's when he began re-focusing his business as a nursery.

Problems such as QX disease, which devastated the Sydney Rock Oyster sector, convinced him that the combination of hatcheries and nurseries provides the foundation for a more secure oyster industry.

"Only through hatcheries will we get increasingly healthy breeding stock to build our industry with more disease and stress resistant oysters. When you rely on wild catch you have no idea of its genetic make-up. It's a bit like playing Russian roulette compared to the research that is going on at hatchery level to provide the industry with oysters that are bred and cross bred into family lines that represent reliable and robust products that customers want."

Geoff Diemar, Port Stephens oyster grower

He says when hatchery and nursery bred oysters were grown out on oyster farms they also improved the gene pool of the wild indigenous stock.

Geoff's nursery grows Sydney Rock oyster spat, flat oysters and standard and spawnless Pacific oyster from spat that comes from Shellfish Culture. On average 10 to 15 million spat grow in his nursery tanks each year for supply to farmers at varying sizes from 5 to 13mm and other nurseries at times with stock from 1100 to 2240 microns, depending on the type of oyster. Geoff supplies, on average, up to 30 farmers each year in NSW.

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