

University of Wollongong, Blue Economy CRC exploring kelp farming

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By Marion Williams

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Research is underway to explore the benefits and impacts of the emerging seaweed farming and other regenerative industries for Far South Coast communities. Picture supplied.

Australia's coastal waters are home to thousands of native seaweed species and have the potential for a thriving seaweed industry.

Regenerative farming, such as kelp farms and shellfish farming, plays an important role in low-impact food and resource production.

It also helps achieve a healthy and balanced marine environment.

Regenerative farming is considered one of the planet's most sustainable forms of aquaculture.

It involves the natural environment providing the inputs needed for growth so that stock can grow by itself using natural food sources and conditions.

Currently shellfish farming, such as oysters and mussels, dominates regenerative farming in Australia.



The project was successful at securing funds from the Regional NSW - Business Case and Strategy Development Fund - Round 1. Picture supplied.

The Blue Economy Cooperative Research Centre and University of Wollongong have partnered with local aquaculture industry leaders [Sea Health Products in Tilba](#) and [AusKelp in Eden](#) to undertake research to support regenerative farming in waters off the NSW south coast.

The focus of the social, economic and cultural research will be on the emerging seaweed farming industry and shellfish farming.

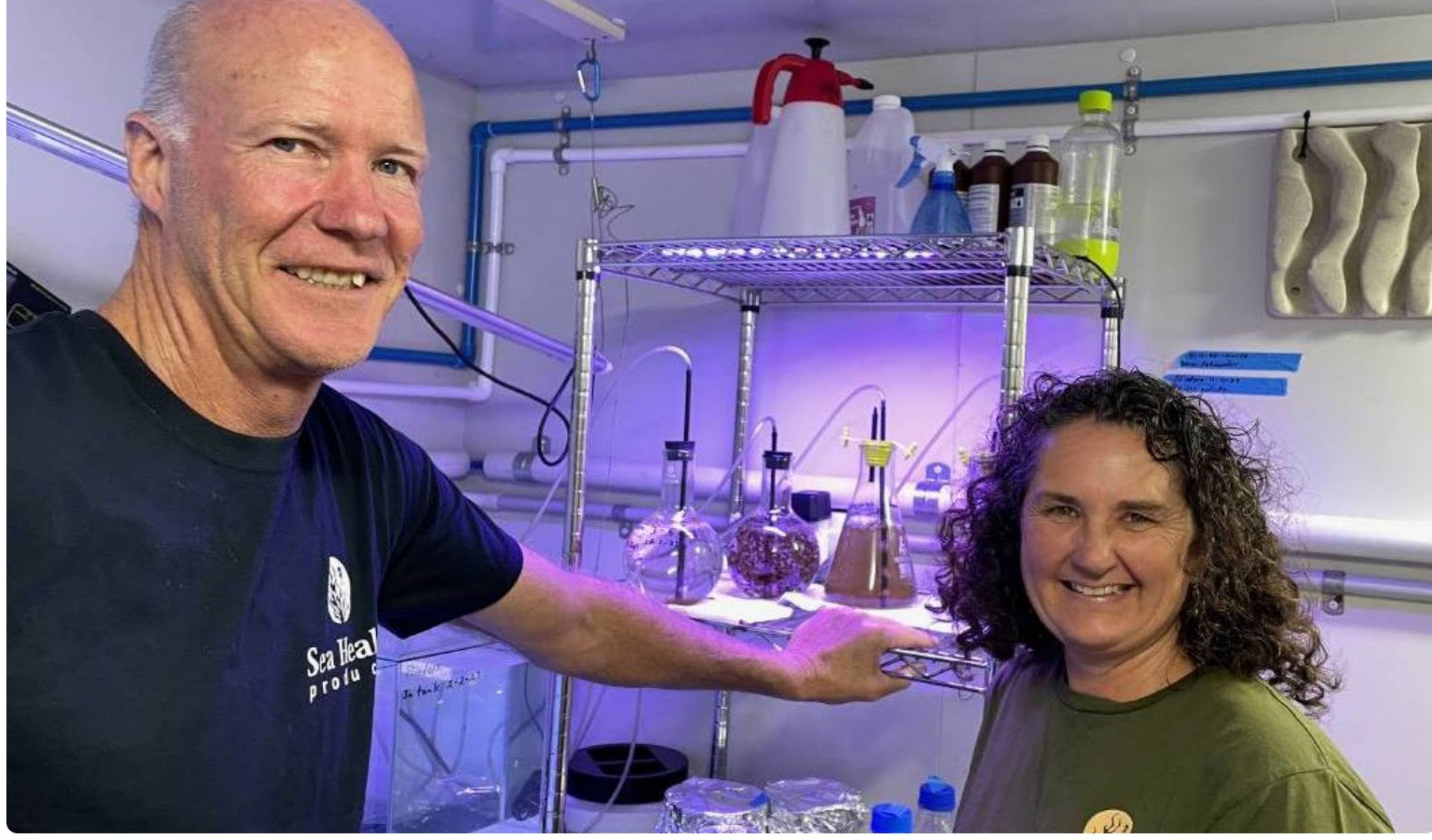
They will explore the benefits and impacts of the emerging seaweed farming and other regenerative industries for local communities in the area.

A thriving seaweed industry will greatly contribute to local economic growth and play a role in improving water quality.

The research will also examine optimising marine space through the co-location of seaweed and shellfish on the same sites.

The two sites are off Haywards Beach, north of Bermagui, and Merimbula Bay, east of Pambula Beach.

Dr Michelle Voyer from The University of Wollongong said the university's role in the collaboration is to "conduct research which will explore how communities feel about these new activities and how these businesses can work with local residents to share the benefits of the developments and address any areas of concern".



By trial and error, marine scientist Jo Lane of Sea Health Products and her husband Warren Atkins, a commercial air-conditioning and refrigeration mechanic, have worked out how to create a seed bank using kelp's reproductive tissue in their temperature-controlled lab in Tilba Tilba. Picture by Marion Williams.

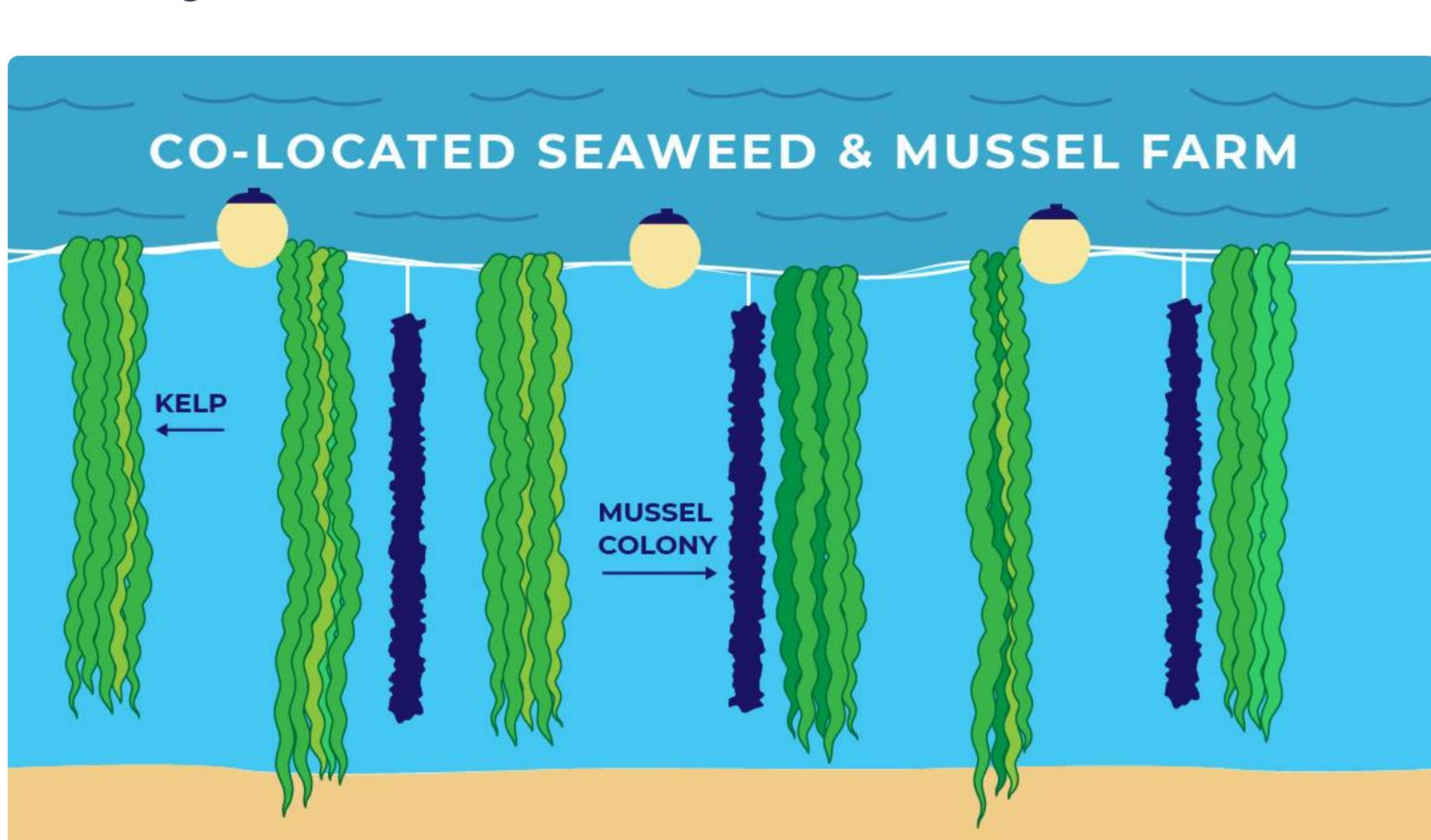
Sea Health Product's Jo Lane is a marine biologist and long-term south coast resident and she is very concerned about the [declining kelp forests](#) which are important habitat for many marine species.

"Kelp farming, often referred to as regenerative ocean farming, has many environmental benefits including reducing ocean acidification and improving biodiversity," Ms Lane said.

Christopher Ride, founder of Auskelp, said increased ocean temperatures have caused a sharp reduction in wild kelp numbers in Australian waters.

"If successful, this project may do more than create local jobs and deliver high-protein foods and products in an environmentally-friendly way.

"Kelp farming may just help to preserve kelp in NSW waters over the longer term," Mr Ride said.



Proposed illustration of co-located seaweed and mussel farm. Image courtesy Blue Economy CRC.

A series of community activities and events are planned in coming months including a phone-based survey and open community information sessions.

The first information session will be Bermagui Community Centre on Thursday, July 20, from 4.30-7pm.