MARCH 2024

SNAPSHOT | UNLOCKING REGENERATIVE AQUACULTURE
ON THE NSW SOUTH COAST

The University of Wollongong and the Blue Economy Cooperative Research Centre have worked with industry, research, government, and community to understand the status-quo of the **regenerative aquaculture industry** on the NSW south coast and identify the **opportunities and constraints** in further developing this **emerging business cluster.**

Findings & insights

We found that regenerative aquaculture is a supported blue economy industry on the NSW south coast. This region is home to regenerative aquaculture industry pioneers who are charting a course for those that follow.

With further collective effort across government, industry, research and the community, we see a strong and vibrant future for a **regenerative aquaculture industry** on the NSW south coast.

Regenerative aquaculture is currently constrained by a **regulatory pathway** to approval that places prohibitive levels of risk on individual proponents.

Regenerative aquaculture as a concept enjoys very high levels of community support in the region, but faces **challenges in implementation** at a local scale.

There is a **gap in the policy and strategic setting**, meaning significant risk is placed on the proponents in identifying sites which are environmentally, socially, and culturally acceptable, or to undertake the necessary community education, consultation or engagement that is required in the local communities where farms are proposed.

> **Maintaining a high level of public support and the trust of local communities will be contingent on:**
>
> △ Demonstrating that regenerative aquaculture is a **nature positive industry** with direct and indirect benefits to community and the environment.
>
> △ Ensuring that **site selection** is conducted in partnership with existing ocean users such as fishers and tourism operators, local communities, and especially First Nations and Native Title applicants.

The research identified a strong interest across **First Nation communities** and organisations in being leaders in a regenerative aquaculture industry, particularly if it can be designed in a way that restores Sea Country.

Looking Ahead & Recommendations

To support the transition and responsible growth of a regenerative aquaculture industry in NSW South Coast, we encourage the following actions:

△ Establish **regenerative aquaculture research trial sites** that can demonstrate the installation types, visual profile and offers transparency of environmental monitoring.

△ Develop a state-wide **regenerative aquaculture strategy and implementation roadmap** to signal that NSW is open for business and has an aspiration to grow this industry.

It must set specific whole of industry goals, objectives, priorities, and actions in the context of the broader marine estate. It should be supported by:

△ A regenerative aquaculture investment and R & D roadmap, including market opportunities analysis, and post-harvest value-adding and circular economy process analysis;

- Regenerative aquaculture sub-sector/ geographical implementation plans;

- Incentives (such as streamlined approvals pathways) to support demonstrably nature positive or regenerative farm design and practices; and

- A monitoring and evaluation plan to ensure it remains current and is delivering the intended outcomes

- Reduce the risk profile for new proponents by developing regenerative aquaculture standards that provide clarity on the pre-approval, approval and operational pathways, including:

  - Exploratory research pathways;

  - Introducing regenerative aquaculture spatial areas of interest identified in partnership with local communities and First Nations;

  - Clarity and benchmarking around regenerative or restorative design and practice; and

  - Co-location pathways to support collaboration with other uses in the marine estate (i.e. emerging offshore wind sector).

- Build regenerative aquaculture into a NSW South Coast Blue Economy Cluster that offers a one-stop shop for strategic and collective coordination of action to grow the NSW Blue Economy - from investor readiness to community engagement to de-risking investment to regulatory navigation.

- Explore a framework for an Aboriginal-led regenerative aquaculture industry for the NSW South Coast, including:

  - Co-Design of an Aboriginal Regenerative Aquaculture Strategy

  - Establishment of dedicated capacity development programs and governance mechanisms

  - Establishment of Aboriginal Aquaculture Development Areas and pilot projects

  - Supporting non- Indigenous aquaculture businesses in the creation of Cultural Partnership Pathways.

- Develop a regenerative aquaculture handbook that offers commercial (species and site attributes, i.e. tolerance, depths, marketability etc), planning, and site related information to support new, emerging and transitioning companies and attract investment in the blue economy.

- Build a multi-disciplinary blue economy workforce that can adapt and support the introduction of regenerative aquaculture focused on skill development pathways for youth and First Nations to build regional readiness.

Together, these are building blocks of a contemporary roadmap for ensuring New South Wales Regenerative Aquaculture industry is thriving, that the marine estate is healthy and productive and that this industry is integrated into the NSW way of life.

FINAL PROJECT REPORTS

VIEW PROJECT REPORTS

Acknowledgement of country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of country and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to their elders past and present and recognise that Australia is home to the oldest culture in the world.

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