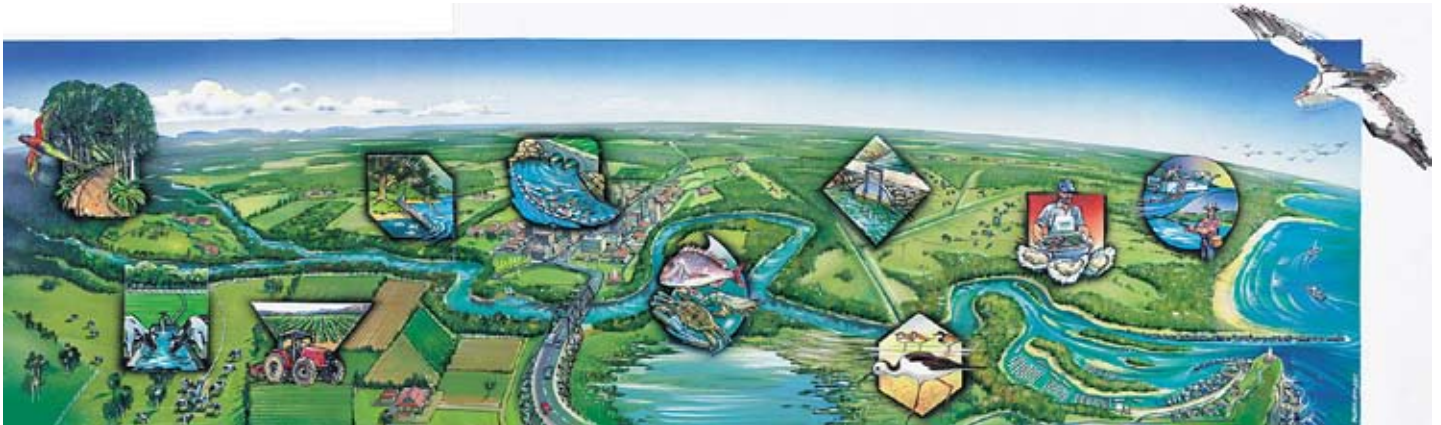


Oysters



Canaries in the mine

Oysters are often referred to as canaries in the mine. They act as a 'scorecard' for the health of coastal waterways.



Our coastal areas support oyster farms, commercial and recreational fishers, land based primary industries, and a quickly rising population of people who want to live, work and play at the water's edge all along the NSW coast.

Oyster farmers are the first people to become aware of poor water quality as they are compelled to regularly monitor water quality in their harvest area. Oyster farmers monitor pollution levels. This includes sewage that might come from humans or animals, algal blooms that are often triggered by nutrient levels, heavy metals and chemicals. Over 8000 tests are taken each year.

This monitoring is done under the NSW Shellfish Program, administered by the NSW Food Authority. For more information, see "Food Safety" or www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au. This monitoring program is costly to farmers, costing approximately \$3.2 million each year to meet its costs, and farmers are currently waiting on the outcomes of a review of cost sharing arrangements with the NSW Government.

A stressed oyster is more likely to succumb to disease and a polluted estuary can mean that oyster harvest areas can be closed for long periods; see "Canaries in the mine – impacts". Oyster farmers are actively involved in catchment management; see "Canaries in the mine – repairing the environment" and partner with other farmers in the sustainable management of coastal catchments; see "Canaries in the mine – farming partnerships".

In 2003, the Healthy Rivers Commission recognised the link between safeguarding coastal waters for oyster production and enabling the community to continue to enjoy a healthy environment.

Communities, farmers, and governments need to continue to cooperate on coastal rivers and estuaries are used and what goes into them.