

JANUARY 2009 EDITION

HASTINGS RIVER WINS PEOPLES CHOICE AT OYSTERS IN THE HOUSE 2008

More than 450 Sydney-siders were treated to some of the best produce the NSW Oyster Industry had to offer at the *Oysters in the House 2008* event held at Customs House in Sydney's Circular Quay on Thursday 13 November 2008. Now in its third year, the event showcased both oysters and wine supplied by Members of the NSW Farmers' Association.



Richard Sheldrake, Jock Laurie, Minister David Campbell and Lindel Gray at Oysters in the House 2008

An initiative of the Association, Oyster Committee Chairman Mark Bulley said the event gives people an opportunity to taste the industry's finest produce. "*Oysters in the House* shows off NSW oysters, gives the public a chance to meet some of the growers, and ask any questions they may have about the industry," Mr Bulley said.

For 3 hours, oyster lovers ploughed through more than 8,400 oysters, putting their tastebuds to the test in an effort to vote for the best in NSW.

"This is a unique approach to what is normally reserved for fine food shows and professional judging.

"We had people from all walks of life attend the event, with tickets selling like hotcakes," Mr Bulley said.

On arrival, all ticket holders were presented with a plate full of oysters in which they had to rank them in order of preference for the *People's Choice* award.

After hours of testing and deliberations, the Hastings River Oysters entry came out on top to take out the honors.

"The winner was hotly pursued by runners up Graham Barclay Oysters of Forster in what was a very close contest," Mr Bulley said.

"This event really lets producers talk to the consumer about their product and gain valuable feedback that they may not have been able to get otherwise," Mr Bulley said.

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NSW Farmers' Association President Jock Laurie congratulated all involved in the event, highlighting the importance of showcasing regional produce in Sydney.

"Whether it's oysters or beef, lamb or poultry, its important city people are educated about how their food is grown and understand the issues facing farmers in NSW," Mr Laurie said.

Mr Laurie says while lobbying governments is the core business of the Association, generating positive publicity for agriculture is crucial.

"The Association is involved in several metropolitan campaigns to promote agriculture in a positive way," Mr Laurie said.

"Our Regional Food Fair held during the Association's Annual Conference is gaining exposure and allowing all sectors of the agricultural industry in NSW to showcase their produce to Sydney consumers.

The Association will be launching a new campaign in 2009 to encourage city folk to support NSW farmers and their produce.

2008- A year in review

2008 was another busy year for the NSW Farmers Associations Oyster Committee (the 'Committee'). Some of the major issues for the year included:

Landbased Oyster Leases

Negotiations with the Department of Lands have continued for the past few years regarding the reassessment of the current Land Based Oyster Lease charges. The Department of Lands position is that many NSW Oyster growers are paying far less than a fair 'market rate' for their land and are looking to bring in a more equitable and uniform system across the state.

The Oyster Committee has been working closely with the Department of Lands to ensure that any changes to the current rental charges are as fair as possible. The Oyster Committee has met numerous times with the Department of Land to discuss the changes, including meeting with the Minister for Lands, the Hon Tony Kelly early in 2008.

After a long period of intense negotiations and industry consultations the Department of Land and the Oyster Committee have signed off on the following proposal:

1. The rent for all Oyster Leases will be \$3.50 per square metre, where there is road access to the site. These sites are considered 'typical sites'.
2. The rent will be further reduced by 50 percent (\$1.75 per square metre) where no road access is available.

3. Rents will be redetermined on a commercial basis every 5 years
4. Rent increase from current rents will be phased in over 3 years, at a rate of one third of the increase rent per year.
5. Tenure of leases will be for a term of 25 years with an option to renew at any time. The Department will contact the lessee within five years and not less than two years of the pending expiry of a lease and commence negotiation of a new lease.
6. CPI will be applied to rents annually.
7. All users of Crown land for oyster farming will be charged the full rent by 1 July 2011.
8. In circumstances where the site or the use of the site, varies significantly from a typical site the Department of Lands will determine an appropriate rent.
9. Where rents increase by more than 200% on the current rent, the Department of Lands agrees to work with the affected farmers and where necessary the Oyster Committee to determine a fair outcome for sites with unique circumstances.
10. The Department of Lands has agreed to establish a mediation process, involving Departmental and oyster industry representatives to resolve any issues that cannot be resolved between the oyster farmer and the Departmental officers

The Oyster Committee believes this proposal represents a significant improvement on the Department of Lands original proposal and we hope that it will allow for a fair and reasonable process of rent determination in years to come.

NSW Diffuse Water Pollution Strategy

The Department of Environment and Climate Change (DECC) is coordinating the development of a Diffuse Source Water Pollution Strategy for NSW, which aims to provide a coordinated framework for limiting and reducing diffuse source water pollution.

The Strategy will assist Councils, Catchment Management Authorities (CMA'S), State Government departments and other stakeholders by providing a coordinated and prioritised approach for managing diffuse source water pollution, setting a general direction for diffuse source water pollution management that can guide investment decisions, and identify possible policy tools that could be used to manage diffuse source water pollution.

A draft of this strategy was released in early 2008. The Committee took time to review the document in detail and provide comment back to DECC regarding the importance of the strategy to the NSW Oyster industry and elements of

the document that could be improved. The finalised NSW Diffuse Water Pollution Strategy document is due for release in early 2009 and the Committee looks forward to working the DECC to ensure it is applied affectively throughout the state.

The Kalang River Closure

A major concern for the Committee in 2008 was closure of the Kalang River due to Norovirus contamination. Unfortunately this is not a new issue for the industry and is just the latest in a long line of contamination events that have occurred up and down the NSW coastline.

Throughout the year Committee members have continued to work with affected farmers from the region as well as Local Councils, Catchment Management Authorities, the NSW Department of Primary Industries, the NSW Food Authority, the Department of Lands, the NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet, the NSW Department of Health, the NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change, the NSW Department of Water and Energy, and Centrelink as part of the Kalang River Working Group (KRWG).

Throughout the year the KRWG has worked to locate the source of the pollution and have the river reopened for harvest. The KRWG is now working with a Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) funded study on norovirus contamination in shellfish harvest areas that is being undertaken by the South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI). The new partnership will significantly boost the capacity of the KRWG to conduct on-going viral monitoring in the Kalang River and identify the source of the pollution.

The KRWG will meet again on Thursday 5 February 2009.

The Committee is deeply aware of the risks that diffuse source water pollution pose to the NSW Oyster Industry and will continue to work via any and all means necessary to help minimise this risk in all NSW Oyster producing estuaries.

Oyster Industry Field Day

The NSW Oyster Industry Field Day 2008 was held in Mooney Mooney on Tuesday 23 September. The theme for the day was 'Oyster Farming and the Environment' and the program for the day included a list of environmentally focussed speakers as well as an industry driven Environmental Champion award sponsored by Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC).

Over 60 people attended the day which included a presentation by key note speaker, Doug McLeod who is an international expert on Oyster Farming and his extensive resume includes: former Chair of the Scottish Aquaculture Training Association, Past President of the 'European Mollusc Producers' Association', and an 'Invited Expert' on the Board of the European Aquaculture Society. Mr

McLeod's presentation provided a great insight into the issues facing the Oyster industry on a global scale while highlighting the many strengths and opportunities for the Australian and particularly NSW industry.

The Environmental Champions awards in the individual category went to:

- Lyn Desoto-Southwell (winner)
- Brett Peterkin (highly commended)
- Rob Moxham (commended)
- Brian and Barry Allen (commended)

The Environmental Champions from the group category were:

- The Clyde River EMS Cluster Group (winner)
- NSW Farmers Hastings River Branch and Port Macquarie Hastings Council (highly commended)
- Farquhar Inlet Management Group (commended)
- NSW Farmers Hastings River Branch (commended)

Oysters in the House 2008

After the initial disappointment of having to cancel the original Oysters in the House 2008 event which had been scheduled to be held on 22 February 2008, the Committee set about rescheduling the event for a suitable time towards the end of the year.

The rescheduled Oysters in the House 2008 event was eventually held on Thursday 13 November 2008 and was by all accounts a fantastic success, attracting a sold out crowd of oyster lovers from all over Sydney and its surrounds.

This was the third year of Oysters in the House and each year brings a new focus and format. 'Oysters in the House' has become the Oyster Committee's premier Oyster marketing event and plans are already under way to ensure Oysters in the House 2009 is bigger and better than ever.

Feedback on Oysters in the House 2008

The marketing and promotion of Oysters in NSW is one of the Oyster Committee's priority issues and to ensure that the Committee's major Oyster marketing event- Oysters in the House, continues to deliver the results desired by industry it is important that we receive a broad range of feedback from as many people as possible.

The Committee is interested to hear any feedback on the Oysters in the House 2008 event. Whether you were present at the event, supplied Oysters or have received feedback from others that participated, we are interested to hear:

- What you thought of Oysters in the House 2008?

- What aspects of the event you would like to see improved or changed for the 2009 event?
- What time of year you think would be the best time to hold Oysters in the House
- Any other comments you may have

Please provide all feedback to

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Or email: widowsr@nswfarmers.org.au,

Moving Into 2009

All in all 2008 was a successful year for the NSW Farmers Association Oyster Committee, with progress being made in many different areas and a lot to look forward to moving into 2009.

Some of the main issues on the agenda for 2009 will include the NSW Farmers Association Industry Field Days; diffuse source water pollution issues; Oyster health; marketing and many more.

As we move into 2009 the Oyster Committee thanks all of the members that supported the industry throughout the past year by continuing on as financial members of the NSW Farmers Association. Without your support the Oyster Committee would be unable to continue in its role of supporting industry in its quest to continue to produce Oysters in NSW both profitably and sustainably. We look forward to working with you all in 2009!

SOCO Update for January 2009 (supplied by Tony Troup, SOCo Board Member)

Nik Duyst has been commissioned to do another QX resistant run which started on the 16th of January. This should be available to nurseries late February, for delivery to growers a few months or so after this (depending on size required) so if you would like to purchase some of these please contact SOCO, or your preferred nursery.

Further runs for the season will depend on orders. Another Winter Mortality resistant (WMR) run may be done however there are currently insufficient orders. If you would like to be guaranteed delivery of oysters early in the growing season next season then perhaps you should consider ordering oysters from Nik's current run, or if you prefer WMR, ordering now so a run can be commissioned. In the past it has been difficult to supply oysters in Sept/Oct, when many growers would like them, due to the difficulties of conditioning broodstock over winter. Ordering from an autumn run will ensure delivery of stock at this time.

Nik has recently completed a WMR run that should be coming out of nurseries now and has just delivered a QXR run to nurseries that should be available to growers in Feb or March. Oysters from either of these runs may still be available, as are oysters from nurseries at larger sizes from earlier runs – contact one of the directors below if you would like more information.

In case you have not already heard there have been some changes to the SOCo Board. Both Rob Moxham and Greg Comerford retired - many thanks to them for their efforts over the years – and new members Graeme Campbell, Jane Clout and John Dawson were elected to the board. Both Graeme and John are from the south coast, Tuross and Pambula, while Jane hails from the far north, Moreton Bay. Both Ray Tynan and Tony Troup remain on the board with Ray as the chair.

The new SOCo website is very close, thanks to Jane. We are still looking for pictures and stories for the new site so if you have anything you want to contribute please let one of the directors know.

The board has established an administrative position to help with the day to day running of the company. Interviews have taken place and the position has been filled by Helen Rosoux. Helen currently works for Ocean Watch part time and has much experience in office administration and book-keeping and is a welcome addition to the SOCo team. This will mean dealing with SOCo should be simplified and you will be hearing more from SOCo than you have in the past.

The breeding lines that SOCo uses are always being developed and improved (for example the release of the WMR line this season). SOCo are aware, after feed-back from surveys conducted, that growers would like the SOCo lines to reach saleable condition earlier. SOCo and ASI (the oyster breeding co. from Tas and SA) are collaborating to find the best way to develop new lines for oysters that will fatten earlier and stay fat longer. This work has commenced but will take some time to show results.

SOCo needs your ongoing support to maintain all the breeding programs so oysters that suit all requirements can be developed.

NSW DPI Aquaculture Extension Update (supplied by Steve McOrrie, Aquaculture Extension Officer, NSW DPI)

Since September 2007 aquaculture extension has dealt with over 300 aquaculture related inquiries and conducted 57 on-farm visits with oyster farmers on the NSW north and south coast.

Over the next few months priority will also be given to the preparation of an Oyster Farming Handbook which will

cover most aspects of oyster farming practices. The handbook is being developed with the assistance of industry and is designed to be of use to new industry entrants as well as existing farmers.

Over the next few months on-farm visits are also planned for the Hastings, Camden Haven, and Manning Rivers on the north coast and the Clyde River on the south coast. Should you wish to meet with Steve to discuss farming technology issues, or any other farm or farm business issue, Steve can be contacted at any time on (02) 4916 3921 or 0429 779 752.

Oysters in the Vines

On Sunday 25 January Cassegrain Wines and Regional Oyster Farmers, from the Hastings River and Camden Haven catchments, held the third Oysters in the Vines Day at Cassegrain Winery.

Based around a similar format to Oysters in the House, Oysters in the Vines is an example of local Oyster growers teaming up with wineries and restaurants from their local region to promote local produce and educate consumers on the consumption of Oysters.

Speaking from the event local oyster grower Mark Bulley said it was the one of the best turnouts in the three year history of the event, despite some light drizzle and overcast sky's. "Around 1,500 locals and visitors to the region joined host John Cassegrain, Cassegrain Wines and local oyster farmers for a fun day."

"Everyone could sample succulent award winning Sydney Rock Oysters straight from the local oyster farms. It was a chance to try some of Australia's finest oysters and chat to local growers about the art of oyster farming."

The event attracted a number of local media representatives including the NBN network. The NBN segment on 'Oysters in the Vines' can be viewed via the following link:

<http://www.nbntv.com.au/index.php/2009/01/25/oysters-in-the-vines/>

The Oyster Committee is keen to hear about other Oyster marketing and promotional events that occur in other regions around the state. If there is an event coming up in your local area please forward a report on the event through to Richard Widows- address opposite.

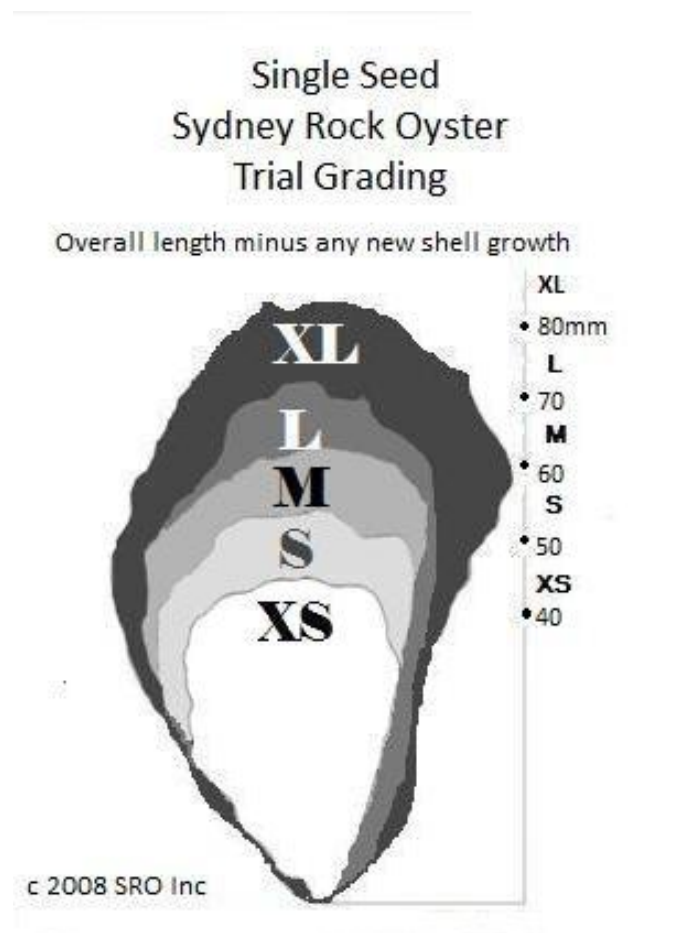
Single Seed Sydney Rock Oyster DRAFT-trial grading chart

Below is a draft grading chart that the Oyster Committee is currently trialling as a possible replacement for the current Oyster grading specifications.

The reason behind this trial is that it is believed the current Oyster grading terms are confusing and difficult for consumers to understand.

It is important to note that this grading guide does not include meat condition but simply uses size of shell as a guide; new shell growth should not be included. Meat condition grading will need to be left to the producer and retailer at the time of sale.

The trial will finish in June 2009 and the Oyster Committee is seeking feedback from growers regarding the value of the draft grading chart below, including possible benefits and concerns.



Please provide all feedback to

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Or email: widowsr@nswfarmers.org.au,

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