

Oysters



History

NSW oyster commercial cultivation is predated by the Japanese who raised oysters as early as 2000 BC and the Romans from about 100 BC. Aborigines in coastal regions feasted on oysters and shell beds can be found in the many middens along the coast – some carbon-dated to 10,000 years old.

When Europeans first settled NSW, oyster shells were used as a source of lime in cement production. Under the demand and a growing population, natural oyster stocks were near depleted by the 1860s.

Around 1870, the Government introduced controls which brought about the first cultivation of oysters, predominantly Sydney rock oysters (*Saccostrea glomerata*), in NSW. The artificial creation of rock beds was the main form of early farming and is only practiced by a very small part of the industry today.

Since the early 1900s, oysters have been grown in NSW using an intertidal stick and tray culture. The introduction of rafts or pontoons in the 1970's, along with transporting oysters between estuaries, produced faster growth rates. In this time production reached 14 million dozen from levels of 3 million dozen after the Second World War.

In the 1980s a single seed system was developed where oyster spat was caught on plastic strips or tarred sticks, removed and grown as single, unattached oysters inter-or subtidally in trays, cylinders, baskets or bags. Today production levels are at 7 million dozen with the area farmed and number of permit holders nearly halved since the late 1990s.

The Oyster Industry Sustainable Aquaculture Strategy aims to return production to approximately 12 million dozen within approximately 3000 hectares.

