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## **10.0 STUDIES, CONSULTATION & PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

### **10.1 Consultation Aims**

- Provide stakeholders with information about the project and the EIS process;
- Provide stakeholders with an opportunity for input to the process;
- Identify stakeholder issues and concerns;
- Respond to issues raised in a timely manner; and
- Feed stakeholder comments into the technical studies of the EIS and into the Social Impact Assessment in particular.

### **10.2 Background**

State and regional government has identified aquaculture as an industry with potential for development in the dry tropics region of Queensland. The following reports specifically identify the potential for aquaculture in the region:

Bowen Collinsville Enterprise Group Inc. (2002b). Bowen Shire Economic Profile 2002 Bowen Collinsville Enterprise Group Inc., Bowen.

Queensland Department of Local Government and Planning (2002). Whitsunday Hinterland and Mackay WHAM 2015 Draft Regional Plan Queensland Department of Local Government and Planning, Mackay.

Gibson Associates (1998). Economic Development Strategy for Bowen Shire. Prepared for Bowen Shire Council, Bowen

A number of studies have been undertaken to further facilitate aquaculture development in the region:

Bowen Collinsville Enterprise Group Inc. (2002a). Identification of Prawn Farm Opportunities in the Bowen Region, Department of State Development & Bowen Collinsville Enterprise Group Inc., Bowen.

Bowen Collinsville Enterprise Group Inc. (2002c). Bowen Aquaculture Development Project - Project Outline Bowen Collinsville Enterprise Group Inc, Bowen.

Bowen Collinsville Enterprise Group Inc. (2002d). Draft Bowen Aquaculture Industry Development Project, Bowen Collinsville Enterprise Group Inc., Bowen.

Deborah Wilson Consulting Services (2001). Community Consultation survey of Aquaculture Developments in the Bowen Region August 2001, Bowen Collinsville Enterprise Group Inc & Department of State Development, Queensland

The consultation undertaken by Deborah Wilson Consulting Services Pty Ltd identified that 87.7% of people surveyed in the Bowen region supported the development of the aquaculture industry in the Bowen region. The report provided valuable information and recommendations on undertaking consultation in the region and on the information that should be provided to the community. The Guthalungra consultation plan was based on this information.

### **10.3 Methodology**

Seafood Farming Services developed a Stakeholder Consultation Plan in association with Pacific Reef Fisheries. The plan was developed taking account of the work previously undertaken in the region particularly the Community Consultation Survey carried out in 2001. As a result the Stakeholder Consultation Plan was designed to target the key stakeholders and at the same time inform the wider community of the project.

Seafood Farming Services undertook the community consultation during the EIS process and maintained clear lines of communication between the key stakeholder groups.

### **10.4 Identification of Stakeholder Groups**

#### **10.4.1 Key Stakeholder Groups**

The key stakeholder groups identified in the Stakeholder Consultation Plan and during the community consultation process were:

- Individuals potentially directly affected by the project;
- Mayor, Councillors and Chief executive officers of the Bowen Shire Council;
- Department of State Development, referral agencies, and other relevant state and federal agencies;
- State and federal members of Parliament relevant to the Project; and
- Community, environmental and business/development groups with an interest in the project.

Refer to the Consultation Plan Appendix T for an expanded list of stakeholder groups.

#### **10.4.2 Referral Agencies**

The Department of State Development is coordinating the EIS. The referral agencies involved in this process are:

- Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy;
- Department of Emergency Services;
- Department of Employment and Training;
- Department of Families;
- Department of Health;
- Department of Housing;
- Department of Local Government and Planning;
- Department of Natural Resources and Mines;
- Department of the Premier and Cabinet;
- Department of Primary Industries;
- Department of Transport;
- Environmental Protection Agency;
- Environment Australia;
- Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority; and
- Bowen Shire Council.

## **10.5 Consultation Activities**

### **10.5.1 Overview of Consultation Activities**

The following activities were undertaken as part of the community consultation process for the Guthalungra Prawn farm EIS from September 2001 to October 2002.

- Letters to individuals directly affected by the project including landholders with properties directly adjacent to the proposed development site;
- Media releases;
- Meetings with Local, Regional and Federal Government Members;
- Telephone contact with key stakeholder groups identified in the consultation plan;
- Stakeholder meetings held in Townsville and in the Bowen area from 17 – 21 June;
- A log of all correspondence with stakeholders during the EIS process;
- Establishment of a Technical Advisory Group;
- Establishment of a Project Focus Group;
- Invitations to stakeholders to visit the existing Pacific Reef property at Ayr;
- Two Day Public Forum;
- Advertisements;
- Meetings with Traditional Owners; and
- Ayr Farm Visits Follow-up communication with those unable to visit the forum.

### **10.5.2 Activities and Results**

#### *Letters to individuals with properties adjacent to the development area*

Letters were sent to individuals with properties adjacent to the development property (Appendix U). The letters:

- Provided individuals with a copy of the EIS Terms of Reference;
- Introduced Seafood Farming Services as the organisation undertaking the Community Consultation and provided a point of contact for the project; and
- Invited landholders to register their interest in meeting with Seafood Farming Services and Pacific Reef representatives.

#### *Media Releases*

Several media releases were prepared during the preparation of the EIS (printed media resulting from the releases is provided in Appendix U):

- One was prepared to coincide with the release of the draft Terms of Reference;
- Another to update the community of the progress of the EIS, and
- A third prepared prior to the Public Forum.

Further media will be prepared to coincide with the public notification stage of the EIS.

### *Meetings with Local, Regional and Federal Government Members*

A presentation and meeting was held with the Mayor and Councillors of Bowen Shire Council. Also, meetings were held with the local State Government members, Jan Jarratt, Member for Whitsunday and Steve Rogers, Member for Burdekin also the Hon. Ian Macdonald, Minister for Forestry and Conservation.

### *Telephone contact and meetings held with key stakeholder groups*

Telephone contact was made with representatives of the stakeholder groups identified in the Consultation Plan. The purpose of the stakeholder group contact was to:

- Discuss the project;
- Invite stakeholder participation in more detailed discussions;
- Organise meeting dates; and
- Invite representatives to view the existing farming operation at Alva Beach.

### *Stakeholder meetings held in Townsville and in the Bowen area from 17 – 21 June 2002*

Each of the stakeholders contacted by telephone was provided with an overview of the project, an outline of the EIS process, and was offered a copy of the Initial Activity Statement and the Terms of Reference. At the meetings, stakeholder representatives were also provided with Queensland Department of Primary Industries background material on prawn farming, maps and the option of receiving a copy of the Initial Advise Statement, the Terms of Reference, maps and tentative plans of the proposal.

Meetings were held with the following stakeholders:

- Bowen Shire Council;
- Bowen Collinsville Enterprise;
- Queensland Seafood Industry Association;
- Sunfish;
- North Queensland Conservation Council;
- Gudjuda Reference Group and Giru Dala Council Of Elders;
- Agforce;
- Gumlu Growers Association;
- Bowen District Growers Association;
- Landcare Group;
- Bowen Tourism & Regional Development Bureau;
- Elliott River Hut Owners Association;
- North Whitsundays Conservation Group.

The feedback from the meetings is outlined in Table 10.1.

### *A log of all correspondence with stakeholders during the EIS process*

All correspondence received from stakeholder groups and individuals are provided in Appendix T.

In particular, neighbours to the property were engaged to ensure that adequate information about the project was available.

#### *Establishment of a Technical Advisory Group*

A Technical Advisory Group (TAG) was established to support the preparation of the EIS. The Terms of Reference and membership of the TAG is presented in Appendix V. Individuals from Agencies and research organisations were invited to participate in the TAG based on their technical background.

Membership of the TAG included:

- Queensland Department of Primary Industries;
- Queensland Environment Protection Authority;
- Environment Australia;
- CSIRO;
- North Queensland Conservation Council;
- Lambert And Rehbein;
- Sinclair Knight Merz;
- Seafood Farming Services; and
- Pacific Reef Fisheries.

#### *Establishment of a Project Focus Group*

A Project Focus Group met to review the progress of the EIS and to allow the proponents and agencies to raise issues and ensure that all had a good understanding of the proposal.

The following agencies attended the Focus Group meeting:

- Department of Natural Resources and Mines;
- Queensland Department of Primary industries;
- Queensland Environment Protection Authority;
- Environment Australia;
- Bowen Shire Council; and
- Department of State Development.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority were invited to participate in both the Technical Advisory Group and the Project Focus Group and declined to attend the initial meetings indicating that it was more appropriate that Environment Australia participate. GBRMPA representatives subsequently attended meetings as observers.

#### *Letters to Key Stakeholder Groups*

Letters were written to key stakeholder groups informing them of the public forum and updating them of the developments in the EIS process. The following were notified of the Public Forum:

- Bowen Shire Council;
- Bowen Collinsville Enterprise Group;
- Queensland Seafood Industry Association;
- Sunfish;
- North Queensland Conservation Council;
- Gudjuda Reference Group and Giru Dala Council Of Elders;
- Agforce;

- Gumlu Growers Association;
- Bowen District Growers Association;
- Landcare Group;
- Bowen Tourism & Regional Development Bureau;
- Elliott River Hut Owners Association; and
- North Whitsundays Conservation Group.

Additionally letters were written to:

- Ms Jan Jarratt, Member for Whitsunday;
- Mr Steve Rogers, Member for Burdekin; and
- Hon Ian Macdonald, Minister for Forestry and Conservation.

#### *Two-Day Public Forum*

In order to enable interested local and regional community members to gain a better understanding of the project and the process being undertaken a two day Public Forum was established in Bowen, this was supported by letters of invitation, a media release, and public advertisement.

A display was set up at the Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE, Bowen Campus. The General Manager of Pacific Reef Fisheries, Mr Kevin Smyth, and Mr Carl Young, a senior consultant to the EIS project manned the display over the two-day period. The issues raised at the forum are included in Table 10-1.

The stand included posters of the proposal, aerial photographs, reports, background material, facts sheets and contact details. The local newspaper ran a story on the event.

A number of stakeholders were unable to visit the forum. Follow-up telephone calls were made to a number of individuals to discuss the project as a result of recommendations by those who did attend the forum. Meetings were undertaken with a number of key stakeholders that could not attend the forum.

#### *Advertisements*

Two advertisements were placed in local papers and national newspapers during the preparation of the EIS, the first to notify the community of the public submission phase of the EIS and the second to notify the community of the Public Forum.

#### *Meetings with Traditional Owners*

Several meetings were held with the Traditional Owners represented by the Gudjuda Reference Group, the Giru Dala Council of Elders, and Native Title claimants. These meetings sought to address a number of consultation requirements including:

- Introductory discussions on the project;
- Preparation for a site visit to the existing farm at Ayr and Guthalungra;
- Site Visit to Ayr and Guthalungra including further discussions regarding the project;
- Womens visit to the site;
- Preparation for the Cultural Heritage Survey;

- Undertaking Cultural Heritage Survey;
- Feedback on the Cultural Heritage Survey; and
- Finalisation of Cultural Heritage Report.

*Site Visits to Alva Beach Prawn farm at Ayr*

Whenever meetings were held with stakeholders, interested individuals and groups, an invitation was extended to those intending to visit the existing Pacific Reef Fisheries property at Ayr.

*Preparation of Information Pack*

A package of information was made available to stakeholders at the various meetings and organised events. Several documents were made available including:

Duncan P.F., & Marsden G.E. (2000). *Australian Prawn Farming Industry- The Industry and its Issues*. Queensland Department of Primary Industries.

Lambert & Rehbein (2002). Guthalungra Initial Advice Statement, Pacific Reef Fisheries Pty Ltd, Ayr.

Seafood Farming Services, Guthalungra Prawn Farm Development Quick Facts File, October 2002 (Included in Appendix U).

A series of maps, aerial photographs and diagrams also were made available.

## **10.6 Conclusions and Recommendations**

*Summary of Key Issues Identified*

Table 10-1 provides a summary of the comments received during the consultation. The issues listed were further discussed at length during interviews and presentations.

All issues were forwarded to Pacific Reef Fisheries and have been addressed in the relevant section of the EIS.



**Table 10-1  
Summary of Key Issues Raised**

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Issue Raised</b>	<b>Number of times issue was raised*</b>	<b>EIS section in which issue is addressed</b>
Financial Viability of the Project	The infrastructure is so costly that the project will not be profitable	1	7.14 Guthalungra Business Plan – Confidential Report
Financial capacity of the investors	Insufficient evidence that the owners of Pacific Reef have financial capacity to undertake the project	1	1.3
Access to property and adjacent properties	Traditional Owners require access to culturally important areas	1	7.12 Cultural Heritage Report – Confidential Report
Use of antibiotics and chemicals	Antibiotics and chemicals used in prawn farming have a detrimental impact on the environment.	2	4.4
Terrestrial flora and Fauna	Negative impact of pipeline construction and operation on wetland areas.	1	7.2
Risk of equipment failure	Pipeline rupture would result in damage to freshwater wetlands.	1	7.2
Aquatic Flora and Fauna	Impact of discharge on fish stocks.	5	7.2
Prawn Farm Operation including:			
Water Discharge quality impacts on the environment	Potential adverse impact on estuarine areas and important fish habitat areas.	5	7.2
Impacts of disease on wild stocks	Potential impact of pathogens on wild stocks of prawns.	1	7.2
Permeability of the ponds and impacts on Ground water	Potential impact of salt-water seepage on local ground water.	3	7.1
Disturbance of acid sulphate soils	Impact of construction and operation on acid sulphate soils.	1	7.1
Environmental damage	Non-specific perception that prawn farming is detrimental.	2	7
Employment	The employment prospects are overstated in development proposals. Staff will not be employed from the local workforce.	1	7.9
Noise	What are local noise levels?	1	7.3
Smell	Are there local odours?	1	7.4
On-site accommodation	How many staff will be permanently accommodated on site?	1	4.1
Fishing	Potential adverse Impacts on fish stocks, particularly around the Elliott River mouth.	6	7.2

Topic	Issue Raised	Number of times issue was raised*	EIS section in which issue is addressed
Visual Amenity - Elliott River	Several issues raised regarding visual amenity	3	7.8
Cultural Heritage	A wide range of issues was raised during the consultation with the Traditional Owners – These issues are discussed in the Cultural Heritage Report.	Numerous	7.12 Cultural Heritage Report – Confidential Report
General Support	Most interviewed gave support for the proposal on the understanding that there would be no significant adverse environmental impact	Numerous	
General Opposition	No unqualified opposition.		
Water Treatment Measures	Re-use measures should be implemented.	1	7.5
High salinity water	The region is not appropriate for prawn farming because of the evaporation and low rainfall that will result in high pond salinity.	1	7.5

\*Many issues were discussed with stakeholders; those listed in the table are comments or concerns that were raised specifically by Non Government Organisations (NGO's) and local community members. Agency issues were incorporated in the TOR and further raised at site visits and meetings.

The issues raised during the Community Consultation are further discussed below:

*Concerns over the economy of the region:*

The majority of individuals involved in the consultation located in the region were extremely keen to see successful businesses established in the Bowen Shire. The need for jobs and job security was raised as extremely important and the need to stem the dwindling economic base of the region a priority. Virtually all of the local individuals involved in the consultation made comment on the economy of the region and the need to address the issues of declining populations and job prospects for the younger generations.

*Maintenance of recreational and lifestyle values*

Many of the local residents involved in discussions were adamant that there should be no impact from the proposal on the existing community use of the coastal resource. Unacceptable environmental impacts, removal of access, or negative impacts on visual amenity that would impinge on high use recreational areas would not be supported. The mouth of the Elliott River, the riverbanks and local beaches, are relatively high use recreational areas used by the local population. There were very strong opinions regarding the need to maintain the existing recreational use of these areas.

### *Impacts on the environment*

Community comments regarding the environment tended to be of a general rather than specific nature. It was fairly unanimous that unacceptable impacts on the marine or terrestrial environment must be avoided. A number of farmers were supportive of achieving a better economic return from agricultural land and saw prawn farming as an opportunity for this to occur.

### *The Seafood Online Factor*

The heavily advertised public float and subsequent financial collapse of an aquaculture project to the south of Guthalungra has raised a level of caution and suspicion regarding aquaculture within the local community. Unfortunately, Queensland has hosted a number of failed aquaculture ventures like Seafood Online. These failures largely come from the lack technical ability of the proponents. However it is interesting to note that one of Queensland largest previous aquaculture failures at Innisfail has gone on to become Queensland largest and most successful operation under new ownership. The Seafood Online facility has now been taken over by more experienced aquaculture operators.

The Guthalungra consultation process has attempted to inform the local community that the proponent currently operates a successful prawn farm at Alva Beach outside of Ayr.

### *Neighbours Comments*

Immediate neighbours at Guthalungra were keen to discuss the local impacts of the operation in particular issues such as dust, traffic, noise, light and smell. An individual respondent to the Terms of Reference indicated that it was inappropriate to bury pipes below road reserves, particularly the reserve that crosses the fresh water wetland to the beach on environmental grounds.

### *Impacts on the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park*

Federal officers of Environment Australia were particularly keen to determine the community views on the use of a pipeline to discharge water from the prawn farm. This issue was raised during the consultation and all relevant written communication took pains to point out that water would be pumped into the farm and discharged from the farm via pipelines into the waters of Abbot Bay. The community appeared to have a good understanding of the location of the Marine Park and the jurisdiction of the Authority as consultation has been underway recently regarding the rezoning of park areas in Abbot Bay.

The use off a pipeline raised many comments regarding its cost and engineering details. Environmental representatives and recreational users particularly fishermen indicated that the use of a pipeline to discharge into open offshore waters was preferable to discharging into tidal creeks, estuaries and inshore areas. It was perceived that there was more potential to adversely impact tidal creeks with prawn farm discharge than open waters.

## **10.7 Recommendations**

### *Further Community Consultation*

The following lists are taken from Deborah Wilson Consulting Services (2001) and are provided here as an indication of the information that will be supplied to the community as the project proceeds:

Local people identified the following information as being important to them on local aquaculture projects in the Bowen region:

- Environmental information;
- Information on new jobs created;
- How the aquaculture project uses water from local waterways;
- Quality processes used to monitor aquaculture projects;
- How close the projects are to fish breeding and habitat areas;
- How aquaculture projects are monitored by government agencies;
- Information on how aquaculture projects operate;
- The size of the aquaculture project; and
- The type of the aquaculture project.

The most important information people wanted on new projects included:

- Employment opportunities;
- Environmental issues and impacts;
- The economic viability of projects;
- The location of projects; and
- The effect of projects on the community.

It should be noted that the feedback received during the Guthalungra consultation process is very consistent with that received by Deborah Wilson Pty Ltd.

Pacific Reef Fisheries is committed to building its relationship with the local communities and key stakeholder groups in the region. To this end Pacific Reef Fisheries will continue to undertake community consultation throughout the application process.

To achieve this, the ongoing consultation will include:

- Meetings with property owners and key stakeholder groups;
- Advertisements;
- Public information session;
- Mail out; and
- Media.

### *Meetings*

Meetings and ongoing contact will be maintained with neighbours and local property owners near the Guthalungra site.

### *Public Information Session*

A public information session will be held to provide the community with more detailed information on the project during the public notification stage.

### *Advertisements*

The Public Notifications will be advertised. The public information session will also be advertised.

### *Mail Out*

Key stakeholders will be informed of the public notification and public information session personally.

### *Media*

Pacific Reef Fisheries will continue to issue media releases and undertake interviews as the project progresses.

### *Commitment to the Local Community*

To demonstrate its commitment to the local community, Pacific Reef Fisheries will undertake the following activities as the project continues through the approvals phase and into construction:

- Identify the technical expertise that will be involved in the project including contractors and make this information available to the public;
- Make public the opportunities for indigenous employment and where appropriate agreements that have been established with the Traditional Owners;
- Nominate and make public the company contact point for public enquiries;
- Advise property owners and other key stakeholder groups prior to commencement of construction of each component of the project; and
- Place media in the local newspapers prior to the construction of each component and outline relevant information to the local community.
- Maintain a project complaints log.