

Community Information Notice

Proposed Abalone Farm- Pindimar

What is happening?

A *Project Application* has been lodged for a proposed Abalone farm at No. 180 Clarke Street, South Pindimar (Lot 2 in DP 1014623). Preliminary information about the proposal has previously been offered to the local community. This notice is intended to give the community an update on the proposal's status.

What does the proposal involve?

The proposal is for an Abalone aquaculture farm. The farm would involve land-based tanks and sheds within private land, with mainly underground/ underwater pipes providing marine water from the Port Stephens estuary. If approved, it will aim to produce around 60 tonnes per year of live Blacklip Abalone for human consumption. The farm is proposed to be located about 300m west of the village of South Pindimar, separated from houses by areas of mature forest & wetlands.

Abalone farms are common in other Australian states. The current proposal is expected to employ up to 35 people during construction and about 15 people during operation.

Where is the proposal up to?

A detailed *Environmental Assessment* report (EA) has been prepared, describing the proposal and addressing key issues of concern previously raised by the community. In late March 2013, the EA was submitted to the NSW Department of Planning & Infrastructure (DP&I). The EA is currently undergoing a preliminary assessment by government agencies. This may result in some revision of the EA.

Once this process is complete, the EA will be placed on public exhibition so that everyone in the community can find out more and have a say in the assessment process.

How can I find out more about the proposal?

The EA provides information about the proposal and its potential impacts, and will be the most comprehensive source of information. It is expected to go on public exhibition in the coming weeks, when permitted by DP&I. Once this occurs, it will be available on DP&I's website. Anyone can access it from the 'Major Project Register' at www.planning.nsw.gov.au (Major Project 10_0006).

Community Information Session

On behalf of the proponent, we invite the community to another Community Information Session to explain the key points about the proposal and the environmental assessment process.

Details of the session will be determined once the exhibition date of the EA is known.

We invite any interested parties to provide their contact details to City Plan Services so that they can be advised when the EA goes on public exhibition, and can be provided with details about the community information session.

Please provide your email or mailing details to Jillian at:

Proposed Pindimar Abalone Farm- Mailing List

PO Box 688

Newcastle 2300;

or

pindimarfeedback@cityplan.com.au

HOT TOPICS

We understand that some residents may have some concerns about the proposal. We hope that the EA report, likely to be exhibited in the coming weeks, will help to answer all of your questions and resolve your concerns.

In the meantime, below are some brief responses to some key concerns that have been circulating in the community. More detail on each of these issues, and others, will be available within the EA report.

The farm would be on land- how would it source marine water to grow Abalone?

Abalone are ocean-dwelling animals and need a constant flow of good quality water in order to grow. To replicate these conditions, the farm would source marine water from Port Stephens estuary via 2 pipes. After flowing through tanks of Abalone, water would be treated and released back into the Port through 2 other pipes.

Pipes would be buried underground through the foreshore and intertidal areas, and positioned down near the seabed in underwater locations. The outlets would be about 450m from the shoreline and the inlets 540m away, at depths of about 6m and 20m respectively- far away from any shore-based or near-shore activities. From the Port the pipes won't be readily visible, and pipes won't affect swimmer or pedestrian access around the area. Proposed marker buoys would help to avoid conflicts with boat anchors.

How much water would go through the farm, and what would be 'discharged' into the Port?

At full production, up to 50 mega litres of marine water a day would pass through the farm. This large volume would help to keep Abalone healthy and maintain the good water quality of the Port. Only treated marine water would be released- no floating effluent, sludge, dead weed or other substances.

How would the release of farm water affect the existing good water quality of the Port?

Like all animals in farms, Abalone produce waste which must be managed. Farm water would be treated to remove Abalone waste before release, through filtering, settling and other best-practice means.

Studies have been completed which show that any residual waste nutrients dissolved in the water would be rapidly flushed and dispersed. The existing good water quality of the Port is not expected to change in any measurable way, and there are not expected to be any noticeable impacts on water appearance; human, fish or seagrass health; or other values. This water release would be strictly controlled by government license conditions.

How would water extraction affect the Port's aquatic plants & animals? Won't they be 'sucked in'?

The pipe inlets would be at depths of about 20m. At this depth, there are no plants and very few animals present which may be 'sucked in' to the pipes (for example, seahorses and 'baby' turtles live in different habitats to the inlet locations). Water would be extracted at an appropriate velocity so that even small organisms may swim away from inlets. In addition, 'fish screens' (with very small openings) would be fitted to pipe inlets to further minimise the risk of any organisms being drawn in.

Won't the farm be an ugly eyesore on the Port's foreshore?

No- the main farm buildings will be separated from the Port by several hundred metres of dense, established forest. It is unlikely that any farm structure, including the pipes, will be visible from anywhere outside the site.

What are the benefits of the farm & how would this affect the 'green' image of the Port?

Currently, Abalone in NSW are only harvested from the wild, and wild NSW populations have been in serious decline for decades. The farm is proposed to provide a sustainable source of Abalone which may help to reduce commercial demand on wild populations. It would provide economic benefits through the creation of up to 35 construction jobs and about 15 operational jobs, with flow-on economic benefits to the local community expected. The farm won't have any negative impacts on the 'green' image of the Port, as it won't be readily visible or audible from outside the site, and will not adversely affect water or air quality. It may help enhance the Port's 'green' image by introducing a novel, low impact and sustainable farming enterprise into the community.

Wasn't this farm proposal 'defeated' before?

The farm proposal was originally granted development consent by Great Lakes Council and government agencies in 2006. However there was an appeal against the consent in the Land & Environment Court. During the Court hearing, the applicant had concerns about the personal financial implications of the legal proceedings and couldn't immediately produce requested documents, and it was agreed to withdraw the proposal at that time. The proposal was never refused or 'defeated' on its merits. The farm is considered to still have substantial merits. It was therefore decided to submit a new application on behalf of a new partnership.

Doesn't this planning process 'bypass community input'?

The NSW planning system required the farm proposal to be submitted as a 'Major Project' application under the former Part 3A provisions (*Environmental Planning & Assessment Act 1979*). These provisions are now being replaced by a new State policy which deals with 'state and regional development'. Both processes involve a good level of community engagement and input.

A community feedback session has already been held to inform and seek input from the community during the design and assessment phase of this project, and a letterbox information drop conducted. Further community input is welcomed as part of the public exhibition of the EA. Everyone is invited to make a submission to DP&I once the EA is made available, and all submissions will be taken into account during the assessment.