



MAFRI PROJECT SPOTLIGHT
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VICTORIAN MUSSEL FARMING – IMPROVING EFFICIENCY & PRODUCTIVITY

Victoria is the largest producer of marine mussels in Australia. Blue mussels have been farmed in Victoria since the early 1980s, with annual production now estimated at about \$2.5 million (wholesale). The west coast of Port Phillip Bay, around Clifton Springs and Grassy Point, is currently the largest area for mussel farming in Victoria. Port Phillip Bay is regarded as one of the finest larvae collection areas and growout sites for blue mussels in Australia.

The Marine and Freshwater Resources Institute (MAFRI) in Queenscliff, which conducted the pioneering work to establish the mussel culture industry, has been working closely with local mussel farmers as part of their current shellfish research and development program. As a result of annual industry workshops, mussel farmers from all Victorian growing areas have recently been involved in trialing the culture of scallops in the bay as a diversification opportunity, and are also investigating potential new areas for shellfish farming. Peter Bold, a second-generation mussel farmer in Portarlington, is one such farmer who has provided valuable assistance to the MAFRI research projects at the Grassy Point growing area. Peter is also leading the way in technological innovation for the mussel farming industry.

Based on his 17 years experience in the mussel farming industry, Peter designed and built his mussel vessel, the “Sarah Anne” in 1998/99. The “Sarah Anne” has many innovative features to assist in the farming and harvesting of the mussels. She is fully automated with a hydraulic winching and mussel stripping system that allows Peter to lift and process around 400 – 500kg of mussels per hour. This system not only improves efficiency, it also eliminates strenuous manual lifting and manual stripping of the mussel ropes.

Peter’s boat is the only boat in Victoria equipped with an automated ‘socking machine’ that Peter designed himself. Socking is the process whereby small mussels that have been removed from collecting ropes are transferred to their vertical growing ropes, called droppers. Cotton mesh tubes called ‘socks’ keep the mussels in place until they attach themselves to the ropes with their naturally sticky threads. The socking process is usually all done by hand, however on the “Sarah Anne”, this process is automated and has greatly decreased the amount of time taken to complete the usually labour intensive process.

Due to his commitment to the Victorian mussel farming industry, Peter was invited on a field trip to visit New Zealand mussel farms by the MAFRI aquaculture research team in October 2000. New Zealand is acknowledged as a world leader in marine shellfish aquaculture. Their mussel farming industry is seen as a benchmark to be replicated by other countries worldwide. During this New Zealand visit, Peter says his eyes were opened to further opportunities and technology advances for his own mussel farming business.

Peter and his fellow Port Phillip Bay mussel farmers work hard at increasing interest in their product and their industry. There is increasing demand Australia wide for the premium quality farmed Victorian blue mussels, renowned for their tender flesh and delicious flavour. In this rapidly advancing, economically important industry, innovative farmers such as Peter Bold are leading the way in promoting the importance and value of the mussel farming industry.