



Media Release

From the Department of Natural Resources and Environment

July 2002. BELLARINE MUSSELS READY FOR EXPORT

Mussel farmers at Clifton Springs and Grassy Point on the Bellarine Peninsula have been given the go-ahead to export mussels to potential markets in Asia and the Middle East following clearance by the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS).

Rigorous monitoring over a long period was carried out by contractors, Water ECO-science, who gave these two areas the highest possible water quality rating for shellfish growing areas.

The announcement was made at a Victorian Shellfish Quality Assurance Program workshop held at the Marine and Freshwater Resources Institute in Queenscliff recently.

MAFRI scientist, Neil Hickman, assisted in developing National Standards and guidelines which will be the basis for shellfish quality assurance programs in all Australian states and territories. The standards are of critical importance in assuring consumers that the highest quality standards are applied to commercial shellfish aquaculture in Victoria.

Monitoring of the mussel aquaculture areas at Dromana and Flinders is well advanced and these areas will soon be assessed to the same high standards set by AQIS. AQIS audits the Victorian Shellfish Quality Assurance Program every year.

The Victorian Shellfish Quality Assurance Program now provides an extensive database of marine environmental information collected over more than a decade. Louis Vostermas, the Executive Director of the Victorian Aquaculture Council said commercial shellfish monitoring has become a good indicator of marine environmental health. Fisheries Victoria's Aquaculture Manager, Anthony Forster, agreed that this was an example of an emerging primary industry developing in an ecologically sustainable basis while providing economic and social benefits to the region.

The workshop was held for commercial mussel farmers, the Victorian Aquaculture Council, Fisheries Victoria, MAFRI and Water ECO-Science. A web site developed by the Bureau of Meteorology for Fisheries Victoria, so that harvesting can be managed in all commercial fish growing areas was demonstrated.

This will be a vital tool because it reports on rainfall in all mussel farming areas on an hourly basis meaning that the farms can be closed without having to wait for microbiological analysis of water or mussels which can take several days.

"By minimising the risk to consumers the mussel aquaculture industry is in an excellent position to comply with the new food regulations which will be introduced soon," Mr Forster said.