



# Revision of the Australian Shellfish Quality Assurance Program Manual – in light of the FRDC funded PST review

The Australian Shellfish Quality Assurance Program Operations Manual

**Australian Shellfish Quality Assurance Advisory Committee**

**2016**

FRDC Project No **2013/056**

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In submitting this report, the researcher has agreed to FRDC publishing this material in its edited form.

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# Abbreviations

ASQAP	Australian Shellfish Quality Assurance Program
ASQAAC	Australian Shellfish Quality Assurance Advisory Committee
PST	Paralytic Shellfish Toxins
DAWR	Department of Agriculture Water and Resources
FSANZ	Food Standards Australia New Zealand
NATA	National Australian Testing Authorities

## Executive Summary

The Australian Shellfish Quality Assurance Advisory Committee (ASQAAC) committee, is compiled of representatives from the Australian bivalve shellfish industries and the program managers from the relevant food safety jurisdictions, Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) and Department of Agriculture Water and Resources (DAWR). It is the key consultative group with regards to bivalve shellfish safety in Australia.

At its meeting on 13-10-13, the group discussed the need for funding to address one of its pressing issues; the updating of the Australian Shellfish Quality Assurance Program (ASQAP) Operations Manual. This need has been apparent for a number of years and has been on the proposed work program of the ASQAAC committee for over 2 years. However, all members of the committee have full time roles, outside of their voluntary committee function and therefore finding the time to update this highly complex manual has been increasingly difficult.

It is expected that an updated manual will be outcome focused and provide clear guidance that is internationally robust and meets best practice approaches. The updated ASQAP manual will provide the framework to the relevant state agencies in running their state shellfish safety programs.

The objectives of this project were:

- 1 An updated ASQAP manual will be produced
- 2 The updated manual will be internationally peer reviewed
- 3 The updated manual will be agreed to by the ASQAAC

An ASQAAC steering committee was formed to address the issues that had been identified from the FRDC Tasmania PST report, and assess other issues that had rising in the past and future.

An expert on shellfish risk management, including marine biotoxins, was contacted with knowledge on international best practice to write in consultation with the committee the new ASQAP Operations Manual.

Once completed, the manual was reviewed by the full ASQAAC. The final version was accepted by formal vote on the 14<sup>th</sup> of April 2016. The acceptance by all states as this manual as a guidance document provides assurance that all states are operating at a high standard, in accordance with internationally acknowledged principles. The DAWR will now have more confidence when negotiating with overseas countries that the Australian shellfish safety program is operating at internationally recognised best practice levels and is operating consistently throughout the country following an agreed risk based framework.

## **Recommendations**

Supplementary guidance documents need to be produced on:

- the management of sewage incidents in proximity to shellfish leases
- the implementation of biotoxin management, including the use of biotoxin rapid test technologies.

ASQAAC needs to discuss with National Australian Testing Authorities (NATA) a national robust proficiency program for laboratory phytoplankton analyses.

# Introduction

The Australian Shellfish Quality Assurance Advisory Committee (ASQAAC) committee that represents the Australian bivalve shellfish industries and the program managers from the relevant food safety jurisdictions, FSANZ and DAWR is the key consultative group with regards to bivalve shellfish safety in Australia. At its meeting on 13-10-13, the group discussed the need for funding to address one of its pressing issues; the updating of the ASQAP Operations Manual.

ASQAAC agreed that, especially in light of the PST issues over the last 12 months, attracting some external funding to complete this important piece of work should be explored from both FRDC and DAWR.

The output from the project will be an outcome focused updated version of the ASQAP manual that will be adopted by ASQAAC and be referenced in the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code.

This updated ASQAP manual will then form the basis for the review of the state programs by the state program managers and their program steering committees, to ensure Australian shellfish is being grown following risk based, world's best practice, food safety management system approaches.

The formal nature of the ASQAAC structure and of the state program's steering committee structures will ensure that the output of this project will be quickly implemented by the relevant bivalve shellfish growing jurisdictions.

# Objectives

- 1 An updated ASQAP manual will be produced
- 2 The updated manual will be internationally peer reviewed
- 3 The updated manual will be agreed to by the ASQAAC

This project will lead to an updated ASQAP manual that will be professionally written and will adhere to worlds best practice approaches. Once agreed to by the ASQAAC group this new national reference manual will help assure that shellfish grown in Australian waters continue to be produced in a safe manner, following internationally respected risk assessment principles and a scientifically sound management framework, whilst still allowing the various states to tailor the national guidance to their own individual areas circumstances following the risk based principles that will be outlined in the updated manual.



# Method

An ASQAAC steering committee was formed to address the issues that had been identified from the FRDC Tasmania PST report, and assess other issues from the past and future.

An expert on marine biotoxins was contacted with knowledge on international best practice to write in consultation with the committee the new ASQAP Operations Manual.

Regular meetings were conducted with the steering committee in person and over telecommunications.

Include

- ASQAAC meetings for review and acceptance
- Notification of other bodies FSANZ etc
- Uploading to SafeFish website <http://safefish.com.au/technical-program>
- Production of a biotoxin risk template

# Results

The 2016 ASQAP Operations Manual has been revised from the outdated 2009 version and is now published to the SafeFish website for viewing. The new version takes into account new continually evolving issues in a changing shellfish safety environment. It is now user friendly and great to navigate around compared to the last ASQAP operations manual.

The manual can be found on the following link below:

<http://safefish.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Australian-Shellfish-Quality-Assurance-Program-Operations-Manual-2016.pdf>

# Conclusion

This project has led to an updated ASQAP manual that is professionally written and will adhere to world's best practice approaches. The ASQAAC group has agreed this new national reference manual will help assure that shellfish grown in Australian waters continue to be produced in a safe manner, following internationally respected risk assessment principles and a scientifically sound management framework, whilst still allowing the various states to tailor the national guidance to their own individual areas circumstances following the risk based principles that have been outlined in the updated manual.

The state program managers and staff now have a more up to date clear national reference manual to follow, assisting them in running their state based programs.

The shellfish industry now have a risk based, internationally sound, national framework to operate under that will lead to fewer shellfish safety incidents that can have terrible knock on consequences for their businesses. Adherence to this framework will also ensure continued access to current international markets, and the ability to open new markets (e.g. in the EU and US) if desired.

The wider fishing industry will now benefit from greater knowledge of marine biotoxins in Australian growing waters and improved sentinel monitoring to alert them to potential risk in their fisheries.

The Department of Agriculture and Water Resources now have more confidence when negotiating with overseas countries that the Australian shellfish safety program is operating at internationally recognised best practice levels and is operating consistently throughout the country following an agreed risk based framework.

# Implications

There will be multiple beneficiaries from this activity;

The state program managers and staff will have a more up to date clear national reference manual to follow to assist them in running their state based programs.

The shellfish industry will have a risk based, internationally sound, national framework to operate under that will lead to fewer shellfish safety incidents that can have terrible knock on consequences for their businesses. Adherence to this framework will also ensure continued access to current international markets, and the ability to open new markets (e.g. in the EU and US) if desired.

The wider fishing industry will benefit from greater knowledge of marine biotoxins in Australian growing waters and improved sentinel monitoring to alert them to potential risk in their fisheries.

Guidance on the management of sewage incidents in proximity to shellfish leases will be added.

Better management in the shellfish industry will reduce the chance of major food safety incidents involving seafood, and the concomitant negative publicity for all seafood.

# Recommendations

Supplementary guidance documents need to be produced on:

- the management of sewage incidents in proximity to shellfish leases
- implementation of biotoxin management, including the use of biotoxin rapid test technologies.

ASQAAC needs to discuss with NATA a national robust proficiency program for laboratory phytoplankton analyses.

DAWR update the export control orders to be in alignment with the ASQAP operations manual.

## **Further development**

- Phytoplankton proficiency program for the whole of Australia, currently only international programs available.
- Screening tests for use at the farm and laboratories.
- Bacteriophage use.

# Extension and Adoption

SafeFish website will now provide a link to the ASQAP Operations Manual.

<http://safefish.com.au/technical-program>

The manual will be used to feed into international process currently being undertaken and to update advice on shellfish risk management, which in turn will make it grow. This will occur from attending international conferences, keeping up to date with current advances through assorted media and discussed at regular ASQAAC meetings, with changes made.

# Project materials developed

Australian Shellfish Quality Assurance Program Operations Manual

<http://safefish.com.au/technical-program>