

Notes from MPSC for the period November 2023 – April 2024

The Marine Pest Sectoral Committee (MPSC) held its 27th Committee Meeting and Partners' Workshop via a hybrid format in Darwin, Northern Territory, on 17-18 April 2024. The MPSC uses a hybrid format to host its meetings and partners' workshops to enable participation from MPSC members, observers, and partners who are unable to attend in-person.

Notes from the Chair

The MPSC27 Partners' Workshop included a diverse range of presentations on MarinePestPlan 2018-2023 review results, the Northern Australia Quarantine Strategy (NAQS), network approaches to marine biosecurity, and marine pest training, education, and collaboration opportunities. Representatives from industry partners, Australian Government, and State and Territory biosecurity agencies discussed the development of the successor MarinePestPlan and were also given a demonstration of Remotely Operated Vehicles (ROV).

The Committee Meeting progressed key MPSC priorities including discussing development of a successor MarinePestPlan, coordinating national management of carpet sea squirt (*Didemnum vexillum*), development of emergency response manuals, implementation of [National Marine Pest Surveillance Strategy 2021-26](#) activities and introducing the new MPSC Chairs.

This is my last meeting as Chair of the MPSC. Shalan Scholfield and Bertie Hennecke from AG will co-chair of MPSC for the next two years. Shalan is the Principal Director of the Chief Environmental Biosecurity Office and Bertie is the Australian Chief Environmental Biosecurity Officer.

I am grateful for the dedication of the MPSC members, observers, and partners in progressing important MPSC activities. Working the last two years with the MPSC was very enjoyable and I look forward to seeing the progress of the MPSC in the future.

Matthew Osborne
Chair MPSC27



Remote Operated Vehicle (ROV) demonstration by a DAFF officer at a Darwin pontoon. Image credit: René Campbell



MPSC attendees watching demonstration of the ROV. Image credit: Nira Chowdhury



ROV undertaking marine pest surveillance demonstration. Image credit: Nira Chowdhury

MPSC27 Partners' Workshop

The MPSC27 Partners' Workshop was held via hybrid format on 17 April 2024.

The workshop began with a presentation from the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) on the MarinePestPlan 2018-2023 review, which included an overview of the review results and the proposed approach for the development of a successor MarinePestPlan. MarinePestPlan 2018-2023 was successful in achieving most of its outcomes, with 24 out of 29 activities completed during its implementation period. The initial findings from the MarinePestPlan review, identify strong support for the development of a successor MarinePestPlan and that there should be opportunities for greater non-government stakeholder participation throughout the life cycle of the second MarinePestPlan.

The Northern Australia Quarantine Strategy (NAQS) (a division of DAFF) presented on the strategic and operational overview of the [Northern Australia Biosecurity Strategy \(NABS\)](#). There are several projects being funded under the NABS including the Swoop Aero Drone Logistic project and funding a northern Australia campaign of the [National Biodiversity DNA Library \(NBDL\)](#). The aim of the Swoop Aero Drone Logistic project is to rapidly transport scientific samples from remote and isolated islands to reduce transport delays. The NBDL northern Australia campaign has been established to generate comprehensive DNA reference sequences for high priority aquatic pests and native congeners from northern Australia. The project will improve DNA-based surveillance capabilities and support response and management outcomes across northern Australia. NAQS has also partnered with 65 indigenous ranger groups under the Indigenous Ranger Biosecurity Program. Multiple marine pest detections have been made by the indigenous ranger groups in northern Australia including [black scar oyster](#) (*Magallana bilineata*).

The Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) presented on network modelling approaches for marine pest biosecurity. The network approaches aim to build a mechanistic incursion model of marine pests and will map domestic risk hot spots to understand spread rates and pest pathways. The network approach will also measure the risk of marine pest incursions from international sources and identify management opportunities to support marine biosecurity.

The Victorian Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) and DAFF presented on marine pest training opportunities. Regular training is necessary to maintain an appropriate level of understanding and confidence in identification of marine pests. The development of online marine pest training modules was discussed as one option that may provide a readily available resource to a broad range

of stakeholders. The MPSC Communication, Education, and Engagement Task Group will consider developing online marine pest training materials.

Updates were received from several key MPSC stakeholders from sectors such from the Pacific Community, Museum and Art Gallery NT, Maritime Industry Australia Limited, and the Invasive Species Council.

MPSC28 to be held in South Australia, sometime in October to November 2024. The theme of the Partners' Workshop will be 'development of a successor MarinePestPlan'.

Any feedback and suggestions on future Partners' Workshops or how to improve engagement are encouraged and can be sent to MPSC@aff.gov.au. These suggestions will be used in preparation for future Partners' Workshops.

MPSC High Priority Work Items

Since MPSC26, MPSC has progressed the following high priority work items.

National Strategic Plan for Marine Pest Biosecurity: MarinePestPlan 2018–2023

The MarinePestPlan 2018–2023 implementation period ended on 30 June 2023.

Out of the 29 activities listed in MarinePestPlan 2018–2023:

- 24 activities are completed.
- 3 have commenced.
- 2 did not commence.

A systematic review of MarinePestPlan 2018-2023 is underway. The review identifies that there is a clear support for the development of a second MarinePestPlan. In the MPSC27 Committee Meeting, the Committee agreed to the formation of the MarinePestPlan Scoping Group to start the process of developing the successor MarinePestPlan.

The MarinePestPlan Scoping Group will engage stakeholders, coordinate workshops and other activities in order to identify the objectives and activities for the successor MarinePestPlan.

More information on MarinePestPlan 2018–2023 activities and current status can be found on the [Marine Pests](#) website.

National Marine Pest Surveillance Strategy 2021–2026

The National Marine Pest Surveillance Strategy outlines Australia's national surveillance priorities and sets the strategic direction for investment in surveillance.

Implementation of the National Marine Pest Surveillance Strategy 2021-26 (Surveillance Strategy) is ongoing. Out of 15 activities listed in the National Marine Pest Surveillance Strategy 2021–2026:

- 2 activities have been completed.
- 12 have commenced.
- 1 has not commenced.

The Surveillance Strategy Task Group (SSI TG) compiled a list of priority marine pest species for surveillance. The list has 80 priority marine pest species for surveillance. The list will be published on the Marine Pests website.

More information on the status of National Marine Pest Surveillance Strategy 2021–26 activities can be found on the [National Marine Pest Surveillance Strategy](#) website.

Emergency Response (EMPPlan)

The Response manual for invasive marine bivalves is close to being circulated to the MPSC for comment and endorsement. The Response manual for invasive marine ascidians is being currently drafted. The Marine pest response manual has been endorsed by the MPSC out-of-session and will be published on the [Marine Pests](#) website.

Communication, Education and Engagement Task Group (CEE TG)

The Communication, Education, and Engagement Task Group (CEE TG) is developing a workplan to progress communication and engagement projects under activity 4.1 in the Surveillance Strategy. The CEE TG will collate existing communication, education, and engagement materials on marine pest surveillance, and tailor these materials to support projects 4.1.3, 4.1.4, and 4.1.5 outlined in the [National Marine Pest Surveillance Work Plan](#).

The CEE TG will be responsible for collating, adapting, and distributing the educational materials to key stakeholders such as biosecurity agencies, community groups, NGOs, indigenous rangers, educators (primary through to tertiary levels), citizen science groups, researchers, and industry peak bodies. The CEE TG are currently collating existing educational materials across jurisdictions to identify gaps present.

Jurisdictional updates

Since the last update at MPSC26, there has been progress on a range of marine pest biosecurity work across jurisdictions:

Australian Government (AG)

- The Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) is undertaking a formal review of MarinePestPlan 2018-2023. The responses and outcomes of the review are currently being consolidated into a review report. The draft report will be circulated to MPSC for consultation later in 2024.
- DAFF has made progress on domestic and international biofouling and ballast water management and engagement with relevant stakeholders.
- DAFF intends to publish an exposure draft of the Australian antifouling guidelines and in-water cleaning standards on the [DAFF website](#) in 2024 and will then seek endorsement from the MPSC at some stage on the biosecurity standards of the document.
- DAFF has been progressing the response manuals as part of the EMPPlan series (see Emergency Response update above).
- DAFF is funding a research and development program on carpet sea squirt (*Didemnum vexillum*) to help inform management of this species. The program will be progressed over the next three years.
- The Northern Australia Quarantine Strategy (NAQS) conducted three Biosecurity Fundamentals training workshops in Darwin (November 2023), Cairns (February 2024) and Kununurra (March 2024). NAQS scientists provided the training on various biosecurity tasks through presentation and interactive activities. Approximately 110 rangers from 42 ranger groups attended the training workshops.

New South Wales (NSW)

- The New South Wales Department of Primary Industries (DPI) has conducted an assessment through the NSW Marine Pest Working Group (MPWG) for a one-off trial involving proactive hull grooming on a P&O cruise vessel.
- DPI has continued stakeholder engagement in marine biosecurity awareness.
- DPI engaged a social research contractor to conduct a monitoring and evaluation program following engagement activities. This program will help to assess recreational vessel owners' awareness of biofouling and reporting marine pests and diseases.
- DPI is about to start managing wet storage systems for oysters. DPI is developing new formal management measures for the storage systems to ensure biosecurity. The consultation period has finished, and DPI will do a statewide roadshow in May 2024 to communicate the new rules to oyster growers.

Northern Territory (NT)

- The Northern Territory Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade (DITT) completed annual low tide surveillance activities and regular quarterly surveillance activities in Darwin Harbour. No new marine pests were detected.
- DITT have been dealing with an incident where a compensator hose was brought into NT waters from a decommissioned oil drill in the Timor Sea. Cleaning the hose at sea was not possible and therefore it had to be brought into shore. DITT have undertaken risk assessments, and the risk has been managed.

Queensland (QLD)

- The Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) is currently responding to a detection of Suminoe oyster (*Magallana ariakensis*) in Moreton Bay by undertaking surveillance and continuing to gather information on the nature and extent of the incursion to inform management strategies.
- DAF is working with Queensland oyster growers to develop a suite of communication materials to aid with awareness, passive surveillance, and reporting. CCIMPE has been engaged and will provide advice on the detection.
- DAF continues to deliver the Queensland Seaports eDNA Surveillance (Q-SEAS) program in partnership with port authorities. In this program, they are engaging indigenous ranger groups to provide marine pest surveillance in remote northern Queensland.

South Australia (SA)

- The Department of Primary Industries and Regions, South Australia (PIRSA) undertook consultation on the South Australian Biosecurity Bill.
- PIRSA continues their response to the detection of Asian kelp/wakame (*Undaria pinnatifida*) in the southeast of South Australia.
- PIRSA have detected devil's tongue weed (*Grateloupia turuturu*) in Robe, SA, where wakame (*Undaria pinnatifida*) was previously detected. Devil's tongue weed is being managed in a similar way to wakame.
- PIRSA responded to the biosecurity risk posed by the emergency docking of an international vessel at Thevenard Marina.
- PIRSA have designed new qPCR assays for European clam (*Varicorbula gibba*) and Asian date mussel (*Arcuatula senhousia*).

Tasmania (TAS)

- The Department of Natural Resources and Environment, Tasmania (NRET) hosted the national marine pollution incident response exercise in Hobart (AMSA) in November, giving the valuable opportunity to 100+ NRET staff to participate in an in-depth marine emergency response exercise.
- The temporary moratorium on in-water vessel biofouling cleaning in Tasmania is expected to be concluded in the near future. A new in-water biofouling cleaning policy has been drafted and should be released once it is finalised.
- NRET have noted the potential impact of the European green shore crab (*Carcinus maenas*), through egg predation, on the endangered Maugean skate (*Zearaja maugeana*) in Macquarie Harbour.
- Marine heat wave conditions have led to a significant spike in seasonal growth of wakame (*Undaria pinnatifida*) as well as detections in locations it is not commonly seen.
- NRET will be rolling out the marine pest Passive Surveillance, Education, and Awareness materials in April 2024.

Victoria (VIC)

- The Victorian Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) have undertaken community removal programs for Northern Pacific seastar (*Asterias amurensis*) and Asian kelp/wakame (*Undaria pinnatifida*). DEECA provided advice to the offshore petroleum industry on marine pest risk associated with decommissioning activities.
- DEECA continues its port surveillance program with an extension to four new ports to assist the South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI) in its study of carpet sea squirt (*Didemnum vexillum*).
- DEECA will be launching their month-long Junior Marine Biosecurity Officer Campaign on 7 May 2024, in partnership with the Melbourne Sea Life Aquarium. The campaign will provide children with training on how to report marine pests.
- DEECA conducted research into Northern Pacific seastar (*Asterias amurensis*) pheromone cues and the impacts of Asian shore crab (*Hemigrapsus sanguineus*).

Western Australia (WA)

- The Western Australian Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) continues to focus its resources using a risk/resource-based approach to ensure the prevention and early identification of priority invasive marine pests.
- DPIRD has been involved in a range of marine biosecurity science, compliance, policy, and communications activities for the ongoing response to carpet Sea squirt (*Didemnum vexillum*) at the Australian Marine Complex Common User Facility (AMC CUF) Southern Harbour, and at HMAS *Stirling*.
- DPIRD continues surveillance as part of the State-Wide Array Surveillance Program (SWASP) at 10 ports across the state and conducted surveillance activities at HMAS *Stirling*, Garden Island, and Cockburn Sound, WA.
- DPIRD had a suspected detection of New Zealand green-lipped mussels (*Perna canaliculus*) and possibly Asian green mussels (*Perna viridis*) on a cruise ship in WA waters. DPIRD have issued a quarantine notice on the vessel and provided a directive to remove the mussels and clean the vessel.

Upcoming MPSC Meetings

MPSC28

The 28th MPSC meeting and corresponding Partners' Workshop will be held in Adelaide, South Australia. The date of the MPSC28 meeting and partner's workshop is not finalised yet but will be held sometime in October or November 2024 via hybrid format.