



## The Power of Partnerships

### Sapphire Coast Wilderness Oysters

#### Cultivating a Sustainable Future for the Oyster Industry

##### The issue

Oyster farmers are the end-users of the water that flows through our catchments and they cannot 'shut the gate' to stop unwanted inputs entering their farms. Rural and urban runoff carries sediment, nutrients, pesticides, herbicides, petrochemicals etc and potentially bacteria and viruses into the waterways. Oysters are filter feeders and can absorb contaminants carried in the water while feeding, impacting the growth of the oysters and possibly impacting consumer health. Oyster harvesting operations are impacted by catchment rainfall that pushes runoff into the estuaries.

Like land farms, invasive pest species impact local estuaries. The introduced Pacific Oyster compete for food and residence with the native Sydney Rock and Angassi Oysters, while the European Green Shore crab kills juvenile oysters.

##### The solution

Local oysters farmers banded together to form a local oyster group - Sapphire Coast Wilderness Oysters (SCWO). The group aims to provide a united voice across the six estuaries of the Bega Valley, pooling the energy and limited time of farmer advocates in each estuary - reducing duplication and increasing efficacy.

SCWO has developed estuary wide environmental management systems (EMS) and employed a coordinator to help farmers implement the EMS's priorities of maintaining water quality and improving communication.

SCWO actively cultivates partnerships with Council, Local Land Services, NSW DPI - Fisheries, Far South Coast Landcare, Local Aboriginal Land Councils, Sapphire Coast Marine Discovery Centre and local schools and universities, while fostering good relations with other oysters farmers on the Sapphire Coast, across NSW and Australia, and the broader community.

##### The impact

- On-ground works around river bank stabilisation, revegetation of riparian zones and improved drainage, as well as sealing of dirt roads around immediate catchment areas.
- Reduced feral Pacific Oyster numbers with 'smash-ups' by Koori Work Crews.
- Reduced pollution with clean-ups in conjunction with Clean Up Australia Day.
- Research on oyster growth and mortality, prevalence and impact of European Green Shore Crabs and trial of salinity sensors to more closely link harvesting to estuarine conditions rather than rainfall.
- Improved awareness through estuary farm tours for landholders, local council, agencies and visiting oyster farmers.
- Student education through 'Grow Your Own Oysters' in collaboration with Sapphire Coast Marine Discovery Centre.
- Community education through attendance at local festivals and shows.



#### Key facts

- Sapphire Coast area has 60 oyster farms across 6 estuaries.
- Sapphire Coast Wilderness Oysters has 20 members from across 4 estuaries.
- Over 10 schools involved in 'Grow Your Own Oysters'
- Over 2200 Pacific Oysters smashed by Bega & Eden LALC Koori Work Crews in 2017

#### Project Partners

