

POMS UPDATE - SUMMER 2016/17: # 6 - MAR'17

I think we can finally be confident that POMS is over for this summer as the temperatures have finally started dropping. It has been a long season from December to March, but many farmers tell us that losses have not been as high as last year, and there seems to be a reasonable amount of optimism about the industry going forward.

We will be collating all the information that we have gathered over summer and conducting a survey of oyster farmers affected by POMS in Tasmania after Easter (see details below). We plan to hold a workshop on 14 June 2017, to present this information to oyster farmers.

Please note that this newsletter is based on information that is currently available to us, but it is not an official record of events. In addition, it may contain comments on research that is not yet completed and so not necessarily the final story.

BIOSECURITY TASMANIA - JOHN PRESTON

SUMMER SURVEILLANCE TESTING

Since the last newsletter was issued, Summer Surveillance testing for Dunalley Bay has been undertaken. This involved collecting a total of 30 samples for PCR testing as a representative sample of all of the leases located in Dunalley Bay. The results of this testing were interesting with 1 positive result from the 30 samples submitted. This is consistent with what we expected given the proximity to Blackman Bay where the POMS virus has activated over the previous 2 summers. There had been no unusual mortalities recorded on any of the leases in the area.

It was intended to conduct Summer Surveillance testing in Eaglehawk Bay but falling water temperatures meant that this was not feasible.

The re-testing for Proof of Freedom from POMS has been undertaken in the first 2 weeks of April in Circular Head (Smithton) and Georges Bay (St Helens). This testing is necessary to confirm that areas remain free of POMS heading into winter.

The results are back for Circular Head and the good news is that this area remains free of POMS at this time. I will not be getting the Georges Bay results until after Easter and hopefully they will remain negative as well.

Port Sorell is also a POMS free area however Biosecurity Tasmania has determined after a risk assessment that there is no need to re-test this area prior to winter.

CURRENT SITUATION

As everyone would be aware, this summer has been markedly different to last summer and in general has underwhelmed. Water temperatures have been erratic with the occasional spike but generally lower than expected. In mid – March there was a final attempt at

summer which resulted in some more consistent warmer days and as a result a lift in water temperatures as well.

Approximately a week after the start of this warmer period reports came in from all of the POMS affected areas of fresh mortalities in oysters. This in itself is interesting in that it is clear evidence of a subsequent activation of POMS virus, in some cases, up to 2 months after the initial activation of the summer. The mortalities reported were generally lower than those experienced in the first wave but still significant.

I think that some growers might have considered the POMS season to be over before these more recent mortalities, given the cool summer that we had experienced. Clearly there are dangers in making that call too early, particularly if considering seed inputs or introducing naïve stock.

As always, if you do experience any unusual mortality events on your farms, in the first instance contact me on the numbers below. Additionally I am still keen to hear from anyone in the known infected areas on updates or information about the virus on their lease or within their bay that can help provide a greater understanding of what is going on.

I do think that our “summer”, such as it was, is finally over, however I urge everyone to remain vigilant and continue to employ good Biosecure practices in whatever they do with their oysters

MOVEMENT PERMITS

Just a reminder for those of you requiring movement permits, any permit issued now will be until the end of April 2017. Permits issued after that time will run from 1st May 2017 to 31st October 2017. Please contact me in the first instance if you require a movement permit to be issued.

As always if you have any concerns in relation to POMS or Biosecurity please don't hesitate to contact me.

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UTAS IMAS - CHRISTINE CRAWORD and SARAH UGALDE

WINDOW OF INFECTION and MORTALITY ASSESSMENT

We have commenced collecting the last of our sentinel spat and pulling our gear out of the water and will finish just after Easter. We will then look at the data that we have collected over summer on mortalities and temperatures, and prepare a report for industry.

The assessment of mortalities on farms has progressed slowly, partly because of the high water temperatures experienced in March. We have helped several farmers with counting

alive/dead oysters and plan to work with these farmers, in conjunction with the POMS survey, to get a better understanding of OsHV-1 activity.

POMS SURVEY

The aim of the POMS survey is to learn as much as we can about the POMS virus over the last two summers in Tasmania, and for oyster growers to use this information to manage their farms to maximise their production.

We aim to survey all Tasmanian oyster farmers who have experienced POMS. John Preston or Sarah Ugalde will be contacting growers to explain the survey and arrange a time to meet, and they will then come and ask a standard set of questions. The survey has been divided into five sections, Background, Mortality, Environmental, Genetic and Husbandry information and we estimate it will take about an hour.

We have spent some time lately developing the questions and it has been a collaborative effort between Christine and Sarah at IMAS, John Preston at BT and Ellis Cox at DPIPWE, with great advice from Emily Ogier, an experienced social scientist at IMAS. It is primarily asking questions around what died, where, when and why, along with environmental conditions and management practices. We will be looking for trends within bays and across growing areas.

We will analyse the survey information and present results at an industry workshop to be held at Midway Point Tavern on 14 June from 1-5 pm; details about the workshop will be sent out later. This workshop will also include other relevant presentations and a discussion session. It will be open to everyone and we encourage all farmers around Tassie to come and learn more about POMS, but we would appreciate an rsvp to make sure there are enough chairs and scones for everyone.

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Sarah Ugalde: 0467 750 337 or Sarah.Ugalde@utas.edu.au

ASI - MATT CUNNINGHAM

Hi All,

The late flurry of POMS activity in March has resulted in ASI getting a POMS hit on the YC16 year class in Pipeclay. We deployed 2 structured trials over February/March. The first trial was with 2mm stock and these were deployed across 2 dates in February. We saw virtually no mortality for the first month until the we saw the increased temperatures throughout March. We then, over the period of a week, saw mortalities increase from very low levels to very high levels. We have now started to collect mortality data from this trial and whilst mortality was high we have surviving animals that were subjected to POMS at a very young age (2-3 months from settlement). We have not completed these assessments yet but, regardless of the results in terms of EBV's, getting a hit on these animals is probably the biggest step forward for the breeding program since we gained the ability to breed from surviving 1 year animals. Essentially high mortality means high selection pressure for POMS resistance so these animals will be extremely valuable breeding stock. We are yet to

commence collecting data from the second trial which went out right at the end of the warm period.

The late POMS activity also saw an increase in mortalities of commercially purchased small spat on some leases. From what I have seen the results have been quite variable depending on input time, size, growing technique and area. I suspect that a clear picture may still be some time off in terms of determining the economics of purchasing small spat prior to or during the POMS window. My gut feel, and I am going out on a limb here, is that is a risky proposition especially if we get a warmer summer next year. We are still very confident that “end of POMS season” spat inputs from the high EBV commercial production will show high survival next season when they should be around 12 months of age.

CAMERONS OF TASMANIA – BEN CAMERON

In Tasmania:

Cameron’s have gotten off to a good start to the year, with our biosecurity plan being approved by the CVO, our first audit has been done and are now awaiting a final audit to get the biosecurity tick from our Dunalley Hatchery.

Stock has sold really strongly and we have had strong demand for larger spat sizes, especially in the north of the state. We will be commencing our Tasmanian spawnings at the usual time this year to ensure we can continue to supply good numbers of larger spat to all areas of Tasmania. We are anticipating an ASI triploid run, using surviving brood stock, if we can generate enough demand to warrant a commercial quantity.

In South Australia:

The Cameron’s-Yumbah Joint venture is going really well. We have had two successful spawning with a third on the way. We started supplying spat to the market in February, which has been well received.

On Market aspect, we have noticed strong increases in farm gate price, and low stocking numbers both in Tas and SA.

This is likely to be our last POMS newsletter for summer 2016/17, although we will send out more newsletters when we have relevant information to pass on. It’s been a difficult time but most oyster farmers appear to be still in business and still smiling. Fingers crossed this continues as we learn more and more about the dreaded virus and ways to manage around it.

Christine and John