

# Harvesting and Packaging Techniques for the Australian Native Oyster (*Ostrea Angasi*)



## **Andrew Baker**

National ISS Institute Overseas Fellowship

Fellowship supported by the Department  
of Education, Employment and Workplace  
Relations, Australian Government

**ISS Institute**

Suite 101  
685 Burke Road  
Camberwell Vic  
AUSTRALIA 3124

**Telephone**

03 9882 0055

**Facsimile**

03 9882 9866

**Email**

[issi.ceo@pacific.net.au](mailto:issi.ceo@pacific.net.au)

**Web**

[www.issinstitute.org.au](http://www.issinstitute.org.au)

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Published by International Specialised Skills Institute, Melbourne.

ISS Institute  
101/685 Burke Road  
Camberwell 3124  
AUSTRALIA

December 2008

Also extract published on [www.issinstitute.org.au](http://www.issinstitute.org.au)

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# Executive Summary

The purpose of the Fellowship was to undertake an overseas study program to France, Ireland and Hong Kong to gain:

- A comprehensive understanding of the harvesting and packaging techniques used for the European native oyster (*Ostrea edulis*) by farmers in those countries
- A further understanding of market requirements for packaged oysters
- A further understanding of harvesting techniques used for the *Ostrea edulis*

The Australian oyster Industry is currently concentrated in three states, namely New South Wales, Tasmania and South Australia. Annual production of oysters in Australia exceeds \$100 million (NSWDPI Annual Aquaculture Report, 2007). Sydney rock oysters (*Saccostrea glomerata*) have been produced in New South Wales for over 100 years. This industry has faced serious challenges over the last 20 years, but in recent times has seen a significant resurgence both in public demand for the product and in farmer reinvestment. Both South Australia and Tasmania have developed into vibrant and profitable Pacific oyster growing states. The past two decades have seen both regions producing quality oysters for sale domestically and for export.

The native Australian oyster (*Ostrea angasi*) grows in a wild state in southern Australian waters. This oyster is a close cousin to the European native (*Ostrea edulis*), the world's most expensive oyster. Baker believes the potential is there for Australian farmers to diversify into growing *Ostrea angasi* to meet high value markets in South East Asia and China.

The most critical factor in harvesting the *angasi* for market is meat condition. What qualities most suit the market? At what stages in the Australian season does the *angasi* meet these conditions? What water temperature and salinity levels influence meat quality? How are the *angasi* best harvested to prolong shelf life? Little knowledge of these market requirements appears obvious in Australia.

## Addressing the Gap

Baker spent approximately three weeks travelling in Europe. The aim was to visit French and Irish oyster farmers to study harvest and packaging techniques.

The ultimate aim was to return and share knowledge with Australian farmers in regard to this skills gap. To achieve this aim a research trip was organised to La Tremblade in France. France's biggest oyster field day is held there annually. The opportunity to attend this field day to gain first hand knowledge of farming techniques, seed stock and packaging materials was critical in the Fellowship study trip.

Ifremer, France's leading Fisheries Research Institute, is situated in neighbouring La Rochelle. An opportunity to meet French scientists and tour Ifremer was invaluable in gaining further knowledge of disease issues in *Ostrea edulis*.

Further time was spent in Bretagne working on oyster farms and harvesting and packing *edulis*. This time also included meeting oyster buyers, processors and exporters.

Moving over to the west coast of Ireland included visits to BIM to discuss current attitudes and issues concerning *Ostrea edulis*. Working with several oyster farmers in harvesting *Ostrea edulis* gave the Fellow first hand experience of processes and techniques.

There appear to be two key points in the harvest and packing of the *Ostrea edulis* that relate to Australian native *Ostrea angasi*:

1. Meat condition (related to water temperature and salinity).
2. Training' the adductor muscle to enable shellfish to remain closed for a longer period of time to aid shelf life.

# Executive Summary

Both these factors apply directly to Australian farmers. Having a better understanding of these practices should enable Australian farmers to better meet Australian and International market requirements with more confidence.

The following report provides an overview of the Fellowship experience and this is followed by a series of recommendations for Government, Industry, the Business sector, Professional Associations, Education and Training Providers, our Community and the ISS Institute. These recommendations also include suggestions for engaging in knowledge transfer activities.