

Bonamia Ostreae — information sheet

Prepared 23 June 2017 – Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI)

Where has *Bonamia ostreae* been found?

Bonamia ostreae was detected in Marlborough and Nelson in 2015. It was detected again in two oyster farms in Big Glory Bay, Stewart Island, as part of MPI's surveillance programme for this disease. We are concerned by this find. Extensive sampling to date has not found *Bonamia ostreae* in wild (Bluff) oysters in Foveaux Strait, however, we are continuing our sampling and increasing our surveillance.

What does the parasite do to oysters?

Experience from overseas and Marlborough shows that farms and wild oysters infected with *Bonamia ostreae* could see losses of 80% to 90% or more of oyster stocks within two years.

What has MPI done in response to the detections?

On 12 June 2017, MPI delivered a Notice of Direction to flat oyster farmers in Big Glory Bay in Stewart Island and Marlborough requiring the removal of all flat oyster stocks. We are currently moving with urgency to remove all flat oyster stocks from marine farms in Big Glory Bay on Stewart Island and in Marlborough. This work has involved close cooperation with affected farmers and the wider community in Southland.

MPI has also put in place movement controls legally restricting movements of some shellfish species, including their spat, into and out of Nelson, Marlborough Sounds, and Stewart Island. It also legally restricts movements of farm equipment and vessels to limit further spread.

When was *Bonamia ostreae* confirmed to be present in Big Glory Bay?

The presence of *Bonamia ostreae* on the two flat oyster farms on Stewart Island was confirmed on 24 May 2017.

What action did MPI take in 2015 when the parasite was found in Marlborough?

Since the initial finding of *Bonamia ostreae* in 2015, there have been legal controls in place to restrict movements of certain shellfish species out of Marlborough and Nelson to limit the spread of *Bonamia ostreae* to other areas. MPI has extended these movement controls to Stewart Island, which includes legally restricting movements of farm equipment and vessels out of Stewart Island to limit further spread.

MPI is confident that the movement controls for Nelson and the Marlborough Sounds have been effective. This is backed by extensive testing that shows *Bonamia ostreae* isn't in any nearby areas outside of the controlled area.

Why are there additional measures now, such as removing all the affected flat oyster farms from Marlborough and Stewart Island?

With the detection near Stewart Island, we want to take additional precautions, particularly due to the proximity to the wild population in Foveaux Strait.

Science has strongly guided our decision to remove the oysters from Big Glory Bay. For example, the epidemiology of *Bonamia ostreae*, and the proximity of the two affected marine farms to others, means there is a strong risk of spread to other farms in the area, which would increase the threat to the wild populations.

In addition, the removal of the Marlborough farms will help reduce the disease pressure throughout all New Zealand waters.

What is being done to support people affected by these directions?

Supporting the community, individuals and families affected by the response is a high priority for us. MPI is working closely with the Rural Support Trust, government agencies, the city, district and regional councils and political leadership to ensure welfare services and support is available to anyone who needs it. We have two welfare coordinators on the ground in Southland to provide support to affected farmers, their direct employees and their families.

Will farmers be compensated?

Yes. There are provisions for compensation under the Biosecurity Act relating to losses arising from the exercise of powers under the act. The amount paid depends upon what losses are incurred as a result of any direction by MPI. Affected parties have to apply for compensation. MPI has been talking through this process with affected farmers and will be providing additional information and support.

How are the oysters being removed?

A removal operation has started in Southland. Planning is still underway for an operation in Marlborough. The Southland operation involves securely transporting affected oysters to a landfill for disposal. The operation is a huge task. There is no end date for completion as yet. The plan has been developed with local oyster farmers, wild oyster fishers, local councils and iwi. We are grateful for their support. Our approach will continue to be fine-tuned as the operation progresses.

What is being done to check that the parasite hasn't spread further?

Since March 2016, MPI has conducted six-monthly sampling and testing of farmed and wild oysters for *Bonamia ostreae* in Marlborough, Otago, Chatham Islands and Southland. This surveillance programme is designed to detect early infections, so that measures can be implemented to control spread of disease. The reason testing is conducted six-monthly is to optimise the early detection of the disease, as there is a three-month period between infection and when the parasite is detectable.

Routine sampling of the Foveaux Strait fisheries is planned for September 2017. However, as a response to concerns raised by Southland communities, MPI will shortly be conducting further testing of the Foveaux Strait fishery.

How difficult is it to stop the spread of *Bonamia Ostreae*?

Bonamia ostreae is an infectious organism in the marine environment which it makes it particularly tricky to control, as water currents and other factors can affect spread.

How did *Bonamia ostreae* spread to Stewart Island?

This is unclear, although we believe our movement controls in Marlborough have been effective. MPI is making enquiries to try to establish what happened. We will be talking to a wide range of people and reviewing documentation as part of those enquiries. Our priority at this stage, however, is on limiting further spread to other areas.

Will we be able to eradicate *Bonamia ostreae*?

Our view at this stage is that eradication would be very difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. This is because *Bonamia ostreae* is an infectious organism in the marine environment, which makes it particularly tricky to control, as water currents and other factors can affect its spread.

Does *Bonamia ostreae* affect other shellfish?

Bonamia ostreae doesn't affect seafood such as Greenshell mussels and Pacific (rock) oysters, however, they can still carry it. This is why there are controls in place to limit movements for some species of shellfish, particularly those that are intended to enter water in new locations.

How do I spot infection?

Confirmation of the parasite can only be confirmed by laboratory analysis. Generally, signs of the disease caused by *Bonamia ostreae*, which can often go undetected, are:

- poor condition
- gills that appear corroded
- yellow discolouration of the gills and mantle.

Flat oyster farmers and harvesters who see these signs in oysters, or mass mortality, should call our Exotic Pest and Disease Hotline – 0800 80 99 66.

Does *Bonamia ostreae* present a food safety issue?

There is no food safety issue from consuming oysters that contain *Bonamia ostreae*. Fresh, good quality New Zealand oysters continue to be safe to eat.

Where can I find more information?

A dedicated email address is available for queries about *Bonamia ostreae* (BonamiaLiaison@mpi.govt.nz). You can also phone MPI's disease and pest hotline on 0800 80 99 66.