

Seaweed farming...coming soon?

The South Australian Government has welcomed a new research project to examine the feasibility of farming seaweed in association with existing ocean-based finfish aquaculture.

Agriculture Food and Fisheries Minister said the project by the South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI) Aquatic Sciences, in partnership with the University of Adelaide, promised significant potential benefits.

"Aquaculture is an important rural industry in South Australia, with production in 2008-09 of \$246 million in direct output," Mr O'Brien said.

"There is considerable potential for expansion, especially of ocean-based fish farming.

"With expansion comes increased feed inputs and therefore waste nutrient discharges to the environment.

"By farming seaweed alongside finfish, these wastes could be utilised, decreasing the environmental footprint of aquaculture while at the same time increasing production."

The three-year project, worth \$1.1 million, is funded by the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation, with contributions from SARDI, Adelaide University and commercial participants.

Mr O'Brien said researchers would initially assess local seaweed species for their suitability for aquaculture and their economic value.

They would also examine overseas production techniques, particularly in China, where seaweed aquaculture is well established.

"There is currently very little commercial production of seaweed in Australia, and their aquaculture usage is even more limited," Mr

O'Brien said.

"Australia imports almost \$20 million worth of seaweed per year."

Project leader, Jason Tanner from SARDI Aquatic Sciences, said seaweed was used as a food source, particularly in Asian cooking, and for bioactive substances in pharmaceuticals and nutraceuticals.



Ecklonia is one species of seaweed that will be studied by SARDI scientists for its potential for aquaculture

Dr Tanner said the second phase of the project would focus on studying the reproductive biology and growth of several species identified as being of high interest.

This will enable culture techniques and optimal culture conditions to be established.

"Finally, a preliminary trial of at-sea aquaculture will be undertaken to assess farming techniques in the local environment, which is more exposed than many areas where seaweed aquaculture is currently undertaken," Dr Tanner said.

"Our aim is to develop techniques that will work in association with tuna and yellowtail kingfish farms, which are located in the open seas of Spencer Gulf.

"This will be quite exciting as very little serious work has been done on the farming of seaweed in these regions before."

Key Points

Farming seaweed in association with ocean-based finfish farming is the focus of a new research project.

Seaweed aquaculture could utilise waste from finfish farming, while increasing production.

Australia currently has very little commercial production of seaweed but imports almost \$20 million worth of seaweed per year.

Seaweed is used as a food source and for bioactive substances in pharmaceuticals and nutraceuticals.

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