

Pearl Oyster Industry

Pearl farming in the NT

Pearl farming and harvest in Australia uses the native *Pinctada maxima* pearl oyster, which produces the famed South Sea pearls. The aim of pearl farming is to produce the best environment for pearl oysters to thrive in, so that they produce premium quality pearls. South Sea pearls require warm, very clean water. Pearl farms are in remote areas, away from sources of pollution. Pearl oysters filter their food from the sea so there is no food put into the system. No chemicals or artificial foods are used in pearl farming due to the culture methods and the environment they are farmed in. Studies have demonstrated that, in Australian pearl farms, there is no change in the sea life underneath the farmed area compared to outside.

The pearl oysters are suspended in cages from ropes hung off a line suspended from floats. The lines have an anchor at each end embedded in mud. Pearl culture is not done over coral reefs or rocky areas. Pearl oysters are farmed in very low densities, which minimises risk of transmissible diseases. Movement of pearl oysters is managed, and tests are done to check for health of oysters before they are permitted to be moved to new areas. No infectious diseases or parasites of concern have been detected in the hundreds of oysters tested for movement in the Northern Territory.

Pearl oysters suspended in panels above the sea floor are cleaned regularly to remove barnacles and other organisms that may attach to them. Some of this is collected at a shore base for land based disposal and some cleaning is done over the culture site. All fouling is from the surrounding environment so does not add nutrients or contaminants to the environment beyond what is naturally there. When leases expire or are vacated, it is a requirement that all equipment be removed from the site.