Seafood CRC Oyster Business Benchmarking Project

Report on Extension Activities

22 December 2011

Don Defenderfer
Acknowledgments
This report is funded by Australian Seafood Cooperative Research Centre.

The mission of the Australian Seafood Cooperative Research Centre is to assist end-users of its research to profitably deliver safe, high-quality, nutritious Australian seafood products to premium markets, domestically and overseas.

The goal of the Australian Seafood Cooperative Research Centre is to double the value of the Australian seafood industry to $4 billion by 2017 to generate a significant number of new jobs in rural and regional areas.

The project has been managed by Don Defenderfer at RDS Partners. RDS Partners is a multi-disciplinary team dedicated to facilitating positive social, economic and environmental outcomes in rural and regional Australia.

RDS specialises in projects within the agriculture, seafood and not-for profit sectors.

Contact:
Tom Lewis
RDS Partners Pty Ltd,
P: 03 6231 9033
E: tom.lewis@rdspartners.com.au
ABN 33 125 001 452

Disclaimer
The report authors do not warrant that the information in this document is free from errors or omissions. The authors do not accept any form of liability, be it contractual, tortious, or otherwise, for the contents of this document or for any consequences arising from its use or any reliance placed upon it. The information, opinions and advice contained in this document may not relate, or be relevant, to a reader’s particular circumstances. Opinions expressed in this report are the individual opinions expressed by the authors and are not necessarily those of the Australian Seafood CRC.
## Contents

Acknowledgments .............................................................................................................. i
Disclaimer ......................................................................................................................... i
Project Scope ................................................................................................................... 1
Methods Used .................................................................................................................. 1
Key Findings ..................................................................................................................... 2
  1. Farmer Awareness of Benchmarking Project .............................................................. 2
  2. Participation in the Benchmarking Project ................................................................. 2
  3. Interest in the results of the Oyster Benchmarking Project ......................................... 3
  4. Future Promotion and Extension of the Benchmarking Project ................................. 4
  5. Key Messages for Future Extension .......................................................................... 4
  6. Methods to extend the Benchmarking project ........................................................... 5
  7. Future involvement in the Benchmarking Project and Costs ..................................... 8
  8. Advantages of the Benchmarking Project .................................................................. 9
  9. Disadvantages of the Benchmarking Process ............................................................ 10
  10. Final Comments ...................................................................................................... 10
Conclusions ...................................................................................................................... 13
Recommendations ............................................................................................................ 14
Project Scope
RDS Partners was contracted by the Australian Seafood CRC to assist them to gather and collate feedback from the oyster industry regarding extension and promotion activities associated with the “Benchmarking the Australian Oyster Industry Project” (which is currently being conducted by Shane Comiskey of CDI Pinnacle Management and is funded through the Australian Seafood CRC).

Specifically the tasks suggested to RDS included:

1. Consult with the Australian oyster industry to determine whether there is the need to undertake industry promotion and further extension activities associated with the oyster business benchmarking work.
2. Talk to Shane Comiskey of CDI Pinnacle and Dr Graham Mair of the Seafood CRC to discuss extension of the outcomes and extension support for the oyster business benchmarking project.
3. Provide to the CRC an independent viewpoint as to whether the industry and the principal investigator of the project’s perceptions and plans match and to make recommendations to the CRC on how extension could be undertaken.

The following report presents the findings of RDS’s research and makes recommendations for future action.

Methods Used
Both quantitative and qualitative social research methods were used to generate data for this project. An internet based survey was developed and in-depth phone interviews were undertaken.

Twenty nine growers undertook the Seafood CRC Oyster Business Benchmarking Project survey which was conducted between 30 November and 14th of December 2011. The self-completion survey was conducted on-line and was promoted broadly across industry.

Thirteen of the 29 growers were followed up with detailed phone interviews (12-13 December) to gain further, more qualitative data.

Both Shane Comiskey and Graham Mair (re task 2 above) were consulted by RDS in the design of the survey, consultation mechanisms and in the refinement of the project’s aims and objectives.
Key Findings

1. Farmer Awareness of Benchmarking Project
93% of those surveyed were aware of the benchmarking project before undertaking the survey. This indicates that there is wide awareness of the project among growers.

Although 29 survey respondents is a small sample of the total number of growers nationally, the follow up phone conversations with 13 of the growers supported the comments made in the internet survey that although most growers are aware of the benchmarking project, many do not necessarily understand what it is all about or its potential value to them.

2. Participation in the Benchmarking Project
52% of the growers surveyed had taken part in Round 1 of the benchmarking project and 61% had taken part in Round 2. 63% intended to take part in Round 3.

Of the growers who have not participated in the Benchmarking project, as the table below shows, their main reasons for not participating include lack of time, lack of awareness of the project, irrelevance or expense.

Table 1: Reasons for not participating in benchmarking project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I don’t have time to participate</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was not aware of the Benchmarking project</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The project is not relevant to my business</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The project is too expensive</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments noted regarding reason for not taking part in the project included:
- requested to take part but was not responded to by the project manager;
- financial data not ready when needed for project manager;
- being new to the industry;
- being a hatchery producer; and
- a concern “about the confidentiality of projects such as these and who and where the data ends up with along the path.”
3. Interest in the results of the Oyster Benchmarking Project

Interest in the benchmarking project was excellent, with 15 growers indicating a very high interest, 10 indicating a high interest and 4 indicating a medium interest.

Aspects of the benchmarking project that interested growers are highlighted in Table 2.

Table 2: Aspects of the benchmarking project that interests growers

As the chart above shows (y-axis equals number of responses), financial data, production sales data and production systems information interested growers most about the benchmarking project.

Comments recorded from growers regarding this question also highlighted other aspects of their interest in the project:

- Marketing strategies are very basic - not sure this can be separately claimed, but any information is useful information.
- Potential profit margins in this relatively "young" industry. For many wishing to retire now from the industry the potential profit is a good indicator for those who may wish to. It will give them confidence in the industry as a whole if predictions are good and enable those who have worked hard to reap what they have sown. We also need to provide confidence to our financial backers - banks etc if we wish to be innovative around production technologies and the like.
- It showed me we sell oysters below costs price of producing when held for more than two years. Buyers do not appreciate costs of producing and we need to follow CPI at farm gate
- The things that make a successful oyster business.
- Commonsense recommendations. Identification of R&D priorities.
4. Future Promotion and Extension of the Benchmarking Project

When asked if there is a need to undertake greater promotion and further extension activities associated with the benchmarking project, 27% highly agreed, 62% agreed, 7% didn’t care and 1 grower disagreed with the statement.

This question was followed up in detail in phone conversations with growers. Key themes to emerge from the conversations with growers included:

- Need for more promotion/communication about what the benchmarking project is all about.
- Many growers have heard about it but don’t know the details or how it can be of value to them

5. Key Messages for Future Extension

Growers who were phoned were then asked, if there was to be more communication to the industry about the project, what they thought should be the key messages that need to be communicated.

Key messages growers believe should be communicated and extended include:

- Need to promote what the benefits of the benchmarking process can be - that farmers can use the information for their benefit.
- Need more background for growers on how the benchmarking information can be used
- Benchmarking will show you the costs of production
- Oyster farmers have shared problems and solutions (‘that we can all work on’). Need not be a state segmented industry.
- It will lead to better, more profitable management practices.
- Benchmarking is all about Best Practice for your business and this will lead to more profitability.
- ‘Growers will ask: “what’s in it for me?” - so you need to point out the benefits for them.’

Growers highlighted several important benefits of benchmarking that should be promoted:

- It enables farmers to look at different aspects of their business and see how they are performing versus other similar farmers.
- Farmers who participate in the project will be able to clearly see their bottom line and their profit margins versus other farmers.
- Benchmarking gives farmers information about the things that gives them good results.
- It allows farmers to focus on the profitability of their operations
- I’m a big supporter of the BM project - it’s opened my eyes to whether you are losing or winning.

Key quotes about extension

- The key message to promote is where do I fit in as an industry average - so I can tell my board where we are at. I look at the KPIs to ask why for each one - where are we, what can we do - I use it to go to the board to explain how it’s all going. It allows me to know where the business stands in 25 different areas. It can change your focus quite a bit.
- Most important aspect to promote is ‘this process can help you to get more efficient in production - show where can one improve production and efficiencies’.
Most growers should be 'aware' of it (after all the promotion about it) but only about 50-60% of growers, given the nature of our industry, are really aware of it. What growers don’t know is what it can do for them (i.e. understanding their costs). It allows them to **ID the basics of their businesses**. There was no base available originally for the industry.

People would be very interested to know in where a greater profit margin can be made - this would help industry.

If everyone understand where industry is going people can work out why they are so far off average & make themselves more efficient & what they can do about price rises and be content where we are. **Most useful: things like average price/dozen. Productivity/ha, labour costs vs. average.**

The key message is: it is best practice. It improves your business. That’s the message that needs to get out there. That it will add to your bottom line. It's a business improvement process.

### 6. Methods to extend the Benchmarking project

Growers were asked to identify the communication methods that would assist them to learn more about the Benchmarking project.

As the two tables below show, having a hard copy of the benchmarking project final report was seen as one of the most useful methods. This was followed by conferences and workshops, information sheets and flyers and individual one-on-one sessions as the ‘most useful’ methods of extension.

Having access to information sheets and flyers via email and on industry web sites, field days and one-on-one sessions were also highlighted as being useful to the majority of growers. Regional shed meetings and workshops also figured prominently among growers.

#### Table 3: Benchmarking communication methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication Method</th>
<th>Most Useful</th>
<th>Useful</th>
<th>Somewhat Useful</th>
<th>Not Very Useful</th>
<th>Not at All Useful</th>
<th>Rating Average</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual ‘one-on one’</td>
<td>30.4% (7)</td>
<td>43.5% (10)</td>
<td>8.7% (2)</td>
<td>8.7% (2)</td>
<td>8.7% (2)</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. If you would like to learn more about the Benchmarking project, please rate how useful each of the following communication methods would be for you:
9. If you would like to learn more about the Benchmarking project, please rate how useful each of the following communication methods would be for you:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication Method</th>
<th>Rating 1</th>
<th>Rating 2</th>
<th>Rating 3</th>
<th>Rating 4</th>
<th>Rating 5</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regional ‘shed’ meetings</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field days</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
<td>45.8%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conferences and workshops</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information sheets and flyers - hard copy</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>39.1%</td>
<td>30.4%</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information sheets and flyers - via e-mail on an industry website</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benchmarking Project Final Report – hard copy</td>
<td>45.8%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benchmarking Project Final Report – via email link on an industry website</td>
<td>44.0%</td>
<td>36.0%</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4: Usefulness of communication methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication Method</th>
<th>Most useful</th>
<th>Useful</th>
<th>Somewhat useful</th>
<th>Not very useful</th>
<th>Not at all useful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual ‘one-on-one’ sessions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional ‘shed’ meetings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field days</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conferences and workshops</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information sheets and flyers - hard copy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information sheets and flyers - via e-mail</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benchmarking Project Final Report - hard copy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benchmarking Project Final Report - via email on an industry website</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other key points regarding the best ways to extend and communicate about the benchmarking project to emerge from the phone conversations include:

- Need to go to the growers and have small workshops (vs. presentations at big meetings) – not make growers travel to presentations.
- Needs presentations about the benefits and then follow up time to talk about it (don’t just leave after a presentation).
- Have leading grower testimonials from those growers who are respected; need growers in each state to champion it - they can say what value it was to them, what it has done for them.
- Give people a summary of the 3 years reports so they can see patterns - this will draw them in - so people can see what’s going on.
- Go to state conferences and make presentations
- Seminar presentations with bankers – bring bankers more into the loop. If bankers understand it, it makes doing business with them much easier.
- ‘Projects needs to be pushed and promoted more’.
- *For most of industry, the best ways to extend information is field days, 1:1 sessions and small groups. Busy growers (need hand feeding).*

Barriers to extension noted in the phone calls and survey comments include:

- Not enough time to talk with the project manager when presentations made at meetings
• Information dispersal does not necessarily equate to good communication: A lot of growers won’t read anything – they get too much information, too many emails and are too busy.
• Many growers won’t travel to field days, even to regional one.
• Lots of projects come and go; things get started and not carried through - so this is the context you are working in when you are trying to promote something like this to busy, world weary oyster growers
• Growers not sent information even though they expressed an interest – if someone doesn’t get back to them they lose interest immediately.
• Access to existing information has been slow and difficult to obtain. Reports have been very difficult to obtain in the past. Accessing reports through the CRC has been cumbersome and slow. “Benchmarking is great idea, but if you don’t get the information, you can’t use it.”
• Project manager doesn’t necessarily always get back to people in timely fashion.
• Need to be able to compare apples with apples (e.g. similar producer business models).
• People not willing to pay the real costs - doesn’t make much sense to continue.
• The importance of breaking free of the dominance of the wholesale market is paramount.
• “It's a bit like dealing with wombats.”

7. Future involvement in the Benchmarking Project and Costs
Growers were asked, if they were already participating in the Benchmarking project, whether they would be interested in a benchmarking service offered commercially after 2012.

81% (17 growers) indicated that they would be interested; only 4 growers said they were not interested in a commercial based benchmarking service.

When growers were asked how much they would be willing to pay, all respondents but one said the maximum amount they would pay would be $500; the lone grower indicated he would be willing to pay up to $1000.

Comments from growers indicated that any costs over $500 would deter people from participating in the benchmarking project. It was noted that in NSW the cost to growers was $250, and that growers were still not taking up the offer (this could indicate that cost may be not the only barrier or enabler – as mentioned some growers felt that many in the industry did not really understand the benefits of the project and that is why they were not participating).

It was commented that if costs were over $200, growers would pull away “even though it is well worth it for what you get out of it”. “It will not be high on farmer's lists if it is more expensive.”

Some commented that once a grower had done the benchmarking for a few years there was no need to do it formally again – just a need to revisit the data every year.

Comments regarding future involvement included:

• But the caveat is how much. In reality, if the industry was being surveyed broadly, participation every 2 or 3 years would be adequate once the baseline is derived. It might also be more efficient to gather and enter data this way?
• It is good to compare your own businesses with that of others but once you have identified where you sit, I cannot see much point in continuing every year. Let some others have a go!
With this strong caveat - this is a hard economic climate in which to be adding another layer of cost to any small business. A high cost will deter even the most ardent supporter. Fees should be kept to an absolute minimum if the promoters value this project and wish to see it continue.

Oyster farmers are ‘hard’ - if it costs them much they won’t do it. They think they know it all. Cost may be a deterrent as before it was free. Can’t see why people don’t do it.

Some people are worried about giving their financials for the project.

As a board member I fully support the program; as my own company, it’s $500 that could pay other bills.

8. Advantages of the Benchmarking Project

Growers were asked what they considered to be the most significant advantages and benefits of the benchmarking project. Key points highlighted by growers include:

- Changes your attitude to how you are going
- Provides professional hope for the industry.
- Comparison with performance of other farmers
- Clarification of business components to identify what’s working and not working against national averages. Allows farmers to keep doing what they are good at and address problems.
- Ease of identifying inefficiencies and tracking improvements.
- To understand the basics costs of the business and most effective production options.
- Valuable to boards and banks and changes the way banks react to growers.
- Allows for a quick snapshot of the industry that growers can understand.
- Provides confidence to the business if it is not meeting its own targets that profits are possible and to provide confidence in the industry for bankers and potentially future investors and for succession planning (younger family members) if the industry is doing well.

Other comments regarding advantages and benefits of the benchmarking project include:

- Seeing how you are actually going with different components of your business. It’s a bit like the BAS statement, nobody wanted it when it started, but it does make you do the accounts (and see the figures regularly).
- Benchmarking highlights what’s wrong and what are the good things in your business process.
- Being able to drill down into the information given and then see you are performing against other farmers. See the overall statistics about what’s happening in the industry.
- Straight up it gives you industry averages and shows you where you compare. Gives you financial insight to know how others are doing without knowing their details. It lets you examine labour and equipment components to see if you are using enough resources or too much.
- It allows me to recognise & understand my business inefficiencies more easily and track improvement - particularly for my business investors. It also is a tool to show the impact of events outside the influence of my business - e.g. spat supply difficulties.
- Comparing year to year is most valuable. 1 year snap shot is good, but longer allows comparative analysis. Longitudinal comparison is greatest advantage - you can’t do anything about someone else’s cost structure. Making change over time. Snap shots are valuable, but not the best part.
To quite literally see where your business “fits” within a benchmarked industry. Overall to be able to ID where the industry is spending its money and not being efficient. Find out from other growers where efficiencies can be applied.

Doing the BM encourages you to have a good look at where the costs area and then do something about it.

See where you are going right from the start. See where you can get high profits

To find out that what you are doing is right or wrong (and then what to do about it). Learn what we need to do in terms of sales.

Growers were asked to identify any disadvantages with the benchmarking process.

The large majority of respondents responded that there are no disadvantages to undertaking the benchmarking process.

- It’s a relatively painless process. All these things take time out from production, but you have to make time – there are not really any disadvantages - all advantages if you do it.
- It adds reality to the industry - this is good, it’s the way to do it.
- All running very smoothly from my point of view, Shane and his team do a great job.

Comments regarding this question tended to focus on problems or areas that could be improved, including:

- Need for more one-on-one follow up calls with project manager after growers have their reports.
- Disk is confusing. Information can be complex without follow up - need for a fact sheet explaining what each slide means.
- More explanation would help growers to understand it better.
- Security of information and anonymity issues. It can at times be clear who the participants are by the comments section.
- Project manager needs to act with great discretion with all the information. Data is with a private consultancy and not really under industry management.
- Assumption that the data allocation and treatment of costs in the process is correct and consistent.
- Benchmarking process can take a long time to completed and understand.
- Comparing one business model with another that is not the same is a perceived weakness – need comparative business structures for accurate comparisons.

10. Final Comments
At the end of the internet survey and phone conversations, growers were given the opportunity to make any final or general comments about the benchmarking project and future extension/communication activities. Comments fell under the following four themes:

Publications:

- Need to get information and reports out quicker. Perceived problems with distribution of information (reports etc).
Industry will maintain interest if the timing of the reports can match their needs – eg publication in August for use by accountants and at AGMs

- Publication could be in several formats – summary snapshots and full report
- Need explanation of how to use the information and then examples of it.

**Communication:**
- Need for project manager to keep communication channels open (‘even just an email, if he’s going to be late’.)
- Need for consistent follow up to growers who express interest in participating in the benchmarking project (growers lose interest if there’s no communication back to them).

**Promotion**
- Better promotion on regional and local levels.
- Need to get people out in the field to talk to growers – need to get involved with them.
- Need to ensure information about the project goes out to growers and not just the heads of companies; and companies have a role in extending it.
- Associations should promote the project more (eg not just CRC’s role).
- Use ‘Fishing Today’ and hardcopy reports that go to all licence holders, industry participants

**Monitoring & Evaluation**
- Review past implementation of the project and what has been achieved (e.g. are all the questions relevant (do we need 60 questions?). You could interview farmers in-depth about what’s valuable and not valuable about the project.

Other final comments from growers include the quotes below:

- **Most people have learned about/are aware of it. But we need to keep it on the radar. Keep in on the agenda - especially for the young farmers. The young ones are assimilating it into their thinking - this is real positive. It is a way to move forward - it’s a more professional approach. We were pioneers... and didn’t have this information. It’s a great approach for younger people to have this information at the start at their finger tips - very positive - they need it to be successful - we need this industry – it’s food, it’s jobs.**

- **Field days are good but there’s a decline in attendance - more government people than industry there. There are rewards there for farmers who go. But most don’t have time or are not interested in field days or benchmarking on their own.**

- **Industry as a whole is very fragmented and I hope that all this good work will not just be shelved and not implemented.**

- **The results are too far behind. In a growing business, what happened two years ago is no longer a true reflection as to where the business is currently.**

- **The original industry funded goal of the project was to understand the industry cost base and hopefully drag the less efficient to more efficient and move everyone up the scale as we address areas of cost savings and improvements. The new goal seems to be monitor industry performance from a commercial foundation. The first goal needs to be presented in "edible prioritised chunks" first. The second phase is less clear. Perhaps it will be a good foundation for industry investment by government and private investing/banks/ lenders.**

- **In future they could spend more time analysing different methods for growing oyster in NSW.**
• People are not paying growers quickly these days and then there's a flow on effect from this. This is scary – this makes whole system uncomfortable. Systems are stretched at the moment; very high risk for industry.

• Industry is changing hugely over the last four years - people are focusing on what they are good at (rather than trying to do everything) - specializing.
Conclusions
The research undertaken indicates that industry has, primarily, a positive perception of the benchmarking project. There appears to be wide grower awareness of the benchmarking project however grower understanding of the project, especially its potential benefits, is not as widespread.

There is a need to undertake further industry promotion and extension activities associated with the Benchmarking the Australian Oyster Industry Project. The current momentum of the project could be greatly increased by strategic use of a diversity of communication and extension methods (see recommendations).

Lack of time, awareness and understanding of the project were all cited as reasons that growers have not participated in the project. Potential costs and time associated with the project were also mentioned as barriers to uptake.

Communication issues were also highlighted as potential barrier to uptake, as some growers found it difficult to access information about the project and to maintain contact with the project manager.

Growers have a high interest in the project and are particularly interested in financial data, production sales data and production systems information.

Future promotion of the project should focus on the benefits of the of the benchmarking project to growers (eg ease of comparison with similar businesses, action plan to address issues, ease of identifying what works and what isn’t working, and that benchmarking will lead to better, more profitable businesses).

The idea that benchmarking can change the attitude of growers to their businesses, and professionalize their enterprises (and their interactions with bankers and accountants) should also be promoted.

Methods of future extension and promotion should be diverse and not limited to email or presentations at national conferences. More local (eg shed visits/field days) communication is needed as well as extension of fact sheets, reports and flyers about the project.

The use of ‘local champions’ to promote the project should be considered. Case studies should be promoted. Time should be allowed after presentations at workshops for discussion with farmers to answer their questions so as to increase their understanding of the project.

Costs to undertake the project should not exceed $500 as even this amount can act as a barrier to growers who may be considering undertaking the benchmarking project.
Recommendations

These recommendations represent an independent view on possible future promotion and extension activities for the benchmarking project and how these activities could be undertaken.

1) Further industry promotion and extension activities associated with the Benchmarking the Australian Oyster Industry Project should be developed and undertaken to increase grower understanding of what the benchmarking project is all about.

2) Future extension activities should focus on the benefits of the project and the economic value it can be to growers. Growers need to know ‘what’s in it for them’ and the ease of comparing their production processes with other farmers. The fact that benchmarking can change the attitude of growers to their businesses, and professionalize their enterprises should also be promoted. Benchmarking should be promoted as an essential best practice tool for the industry.

3) A diversity of promotion and extension methods should be used to increase uptake, including:
   - allowing growers easy access to snap shot and full versions of relevant reports;
   - presentations at local, regional and state meetings/workshops/sheds followed up by discussion;
   - short Q & A fact sheets about the project (available in hard copy, email and on web sites);
   - one-on-one discussions where practical;
   - development of short case studies;
   - greater promotion by associations and by individual businesses among their employees; and
   - webinars and teleconferences should be employed where appropriate.

4) Extension strategies should include using leading growers to champion the benchmarking project in their regions. Testimonials and presentations by these growers are recommended.

5) It is recommended that bankers be targeted to be involved in extension activities to increase the uptake and value of the project.

6) Information and reports about the project should be more easily accessible.

7) Reports should be released at times of the year (eg August) that are more useful to growers.

8) Cost of undertaking the benchmarking project should not exceed $500 to prevent cost from becoming a significant barrier to uptake.

9) Communication between the project manager and the CRC with growers should be timely and consistent.

10) More one-on-one follow up phone calls with growers when they receive their reports would assist them to increase their understanding of the data. Explanations for interpreting the data and how to use it would also assist growers to get the most out of their reports.