



NEW ZEALAND  
**Sustainable**  
**AQUACULTURE**

**CARING FOR OUR ENVIRONMENT,  
OUR COMMUNITIES, OUR PRODUCTS,  
OUR CULTURE, OUR TREASURED WATERS.  
CREATING THE WORLD'S  
BEST SEAFOOD**

**2019** SUSTAINABILITY  
**REPORT**

20 MARCH 2020

# INTRODUCTION

Welcome to AQNZ's first ever A+ Sustainability Report. A+ was launched in 2015 and quickly gained substantial industry support and membership. Since then we've been refining the way we gather information and how we demonstrate our improvements, and now we will be able to share our sustainability achievements on a more regular basis.

## WHAT IS A+?

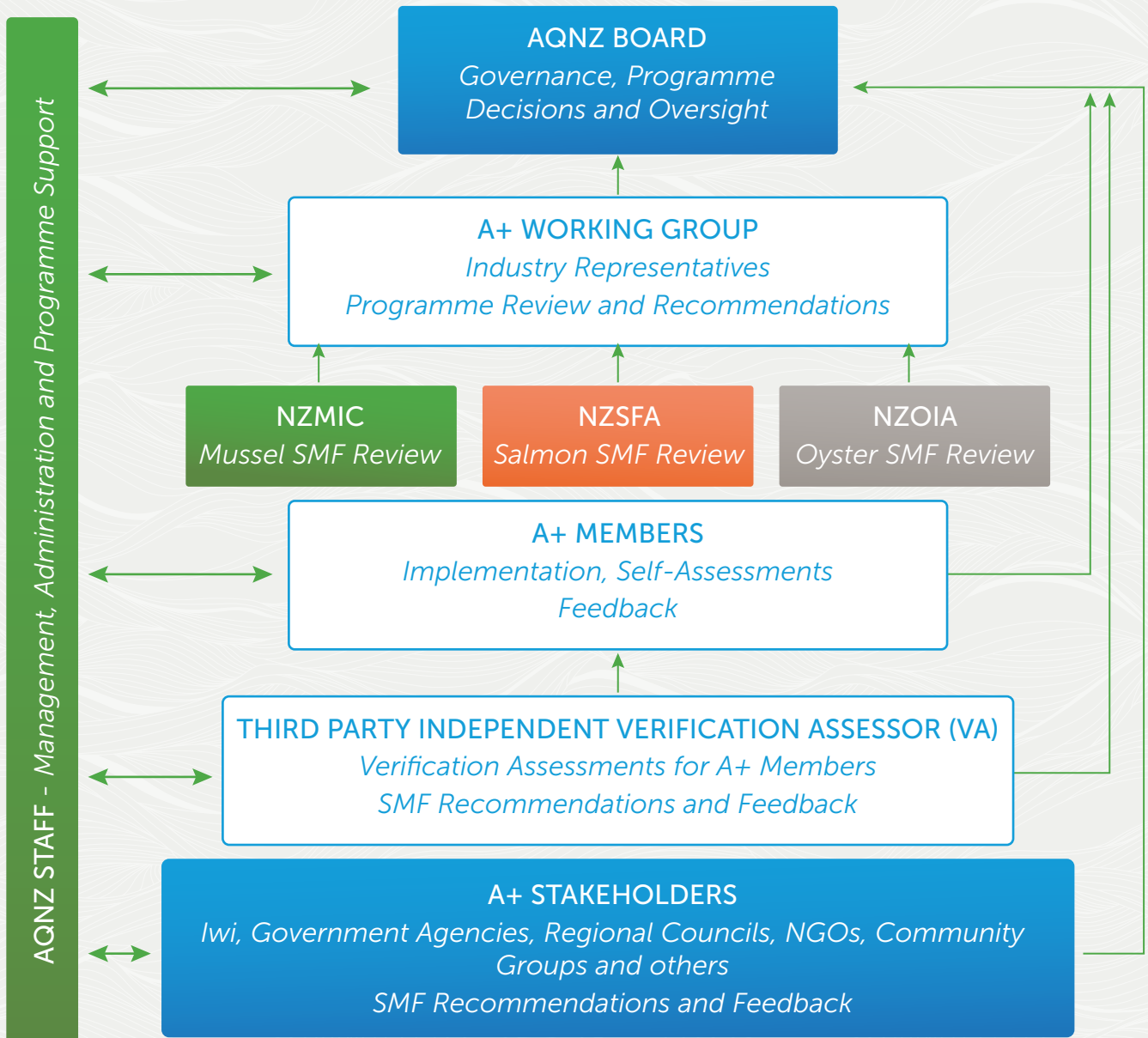
A+ is a world-class sustainable management framework that helps New Zealand aquaculture farmers to better engage with our communities, continuously improve our environmental practices and demonstrate to our customers that New Zealand premium seafood is carefully, responsibly and ethically produced. A+ is an all inclusive programme, encouraging the whole of industry to participate and improve towards a set of universally shared sustainability objectives.

A+ has been designed to promote industry best practice and collectively refine this over time.



# GOVERNANCE

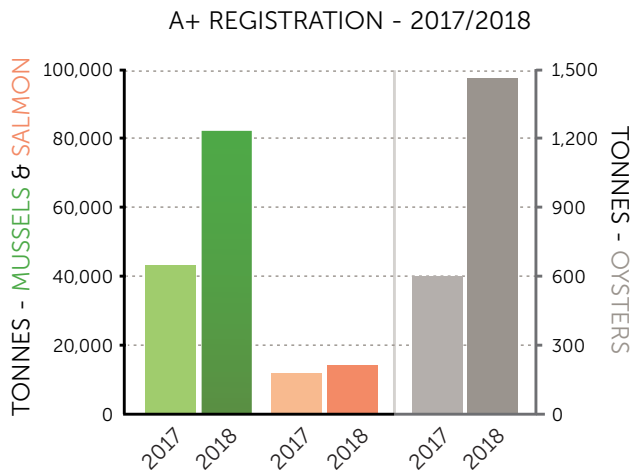
We're ensuring the integrity and transparency of A+ by formalising its governance structure in the A+ Policy Manual (available to view on the A+ website). We have depicted the governance, management, stakeholder engagement and decision-making processes here:



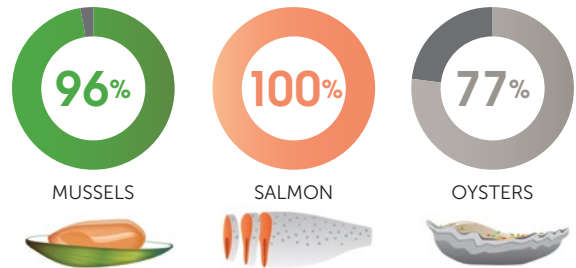
This sustainability report serves a key role in the governance structure by providing all stakeholders, including industry, Iwi, Government agencies, regional councils, NGOs, community groups and others with an update of our progress to date and upcoming plans and aspirations.

# KEY METRICS

## FOR CALENDAR YEAR 2018



PRODUCTION COVERED IN CHECKLISTS



## VERIFYING OUR PRACTICES

This year we have piloted our newly developed 'verification assessments' (VA) utilising the expertise of third-party independent verification expert Belinda Yaxley of Nautilus Consulting. Belinda holds roles in the Global Aquaculture Alliance Best Aquaculture Practices (BAP) programme and the Global Seafood Sustainability Initiative (GSSI).

The first component of our verification was a review to confirm that our verification protocol and the assessments meet the requirements of the ISEAL Code of Practice and therefore global best practice.

After the verifications had been undertaken, we were provided with two reports from the verifier, making comments and recommendations on both the verification process and the industry's implementation of A+.



## THE A+ VERIFICATION PROCESS REPORT

The verification process report highlighted the following:

- The protocol worked well given it was the first assessment under this version of the document
- There was a very balanced mix of farms, from small family owned to the larger more corporate business
- The mussel and oyster industries will benefit from more support in the documentation of procedures and processes, particularly in maintaining this electronically, the salmon farms are well ahead in this area
- Once the farms get used to the process, the type of evidence they can provide during the assessment is likely to improve. AQNZ can assist with timely reminders and examples of evidence as well as ensuring electronic upload is easy and encouraged

## THE A+ VERIFICATION ASSESSMENT TECHNICAL REPORT

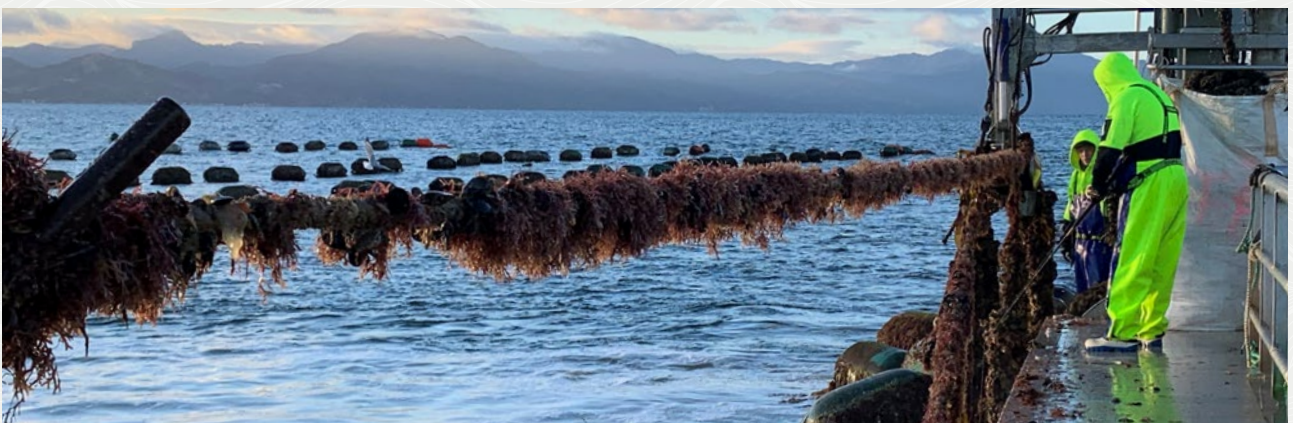
The A+ independent verifier provided a comprehensive verification assessment technical report which noted that:

- During the assessment all farms were observed to have good practices in place, but the assessment highlighted the need for development of objective evidence like documented systems as well as a focus on a few priority areas
- To assist in improving documentation of systems AQNZ will be supporting companies with guidance material on how to develop better systems to meet the A+ requirements
- The assessment report is a key element in the overall cycle of improvement that A+ provides. The implementation of the reports' recommendations will support the industry towards backing its global position as one of the most environmentally conscious and responsible industries in the world

*"Nowhere in the world has an aquaculture industry come together voluntarily and recognised the need for a programme that supports continuous improvement."*

**Belinda Yaxley, Nautilus Consulting**

For each of the A+ objectives and sub-objectives the verification report provides a comprehensive overview of each species group's performance during the assessments as well as analysis of progress towards the overarching A+ targets. In response AQNZ has identified a series of actions and priorities intended to assist the industry towards meeting those targets over subsequent years. We expect that future verification assessments will track that progress as it occurs.



# REPORTING OUR PROGRESS

A key element of A+ is the system of self-reporting checklists that are hosted and supported on the A+ dashboard [www.aplus.org.nz](http://www.aplus.org.nz). This allows farmers to securely record and view their own sustainability progress in confidence so we can report on general trends and progress over time including celebrating a range of sustainability initiatives being implemented across the industry.

Below are some points of note for each of the A+ objectives from the 2018 checklists.



## ECOLOGY MAINTAINING HEALTHY ECOSYSTEMS

SPECIES	2017	2018	COMMENT
All	<i>'Have best practice methods been implemented to minimise organic matter being discharged to the benthic environment?'</i>		
	Benthic effects	91%	97%
All	<i>'Have you provided awareness training to farm staff regarding reducing the impact on marine mammals and seabirds through BMP guidelines and regulations'</i>		
	Wildlife	63%	68%
Salmon	<i>'Do you have a Marine Environmental Monitoring and Adaptive Management Plan'</i>		
	Biodiversity	63%	86%
Mussels	<i>'Do you wash and/or visually inspect seed prior to transferring it?'</i>		
	Biosecurity	74%	93%
Oysters	<i>'Have farm staff been trained in biosecurity management?'</i>		
	Biosecurity	14%	43%

*"We've been contributing to restoration of Marlborough Sounds wild mussel beds"*

**Aroma**

*"We have held several meetings with key stakeholders in the Whangaroa Harbour catchment to introduce our plan to run an Ecosystem Service Review in Whangaroa in 2019"*

**Moana**

*"We're into our 4th season of donating mussels and vessel time to the Revive Our Gulf programme. This year we've donated 30 tonnes to the project"*

**North Island Mussels Ltd**

*"We support a range of environmental projects, including Koru Native Wildlife Centre and Kaipupu Wildlife Sanctuary"*

**NZ King Salmon**

*"We're engaged in a worm farming proposal, to dispose of mortalities in conjunction with a local dairy farmer"*

**Mt Cook Alpine Salmon**

*"We've been heavily involved in King Shag monitoring over the last 12 months with counting, checking and training staff. We run a wasp eradication program in the Marlborough Sounds in conjunction with DOC. Some 20 odd vessel and crew hours have been invested into the program this year to bait and kill wasps"*

**Sanford**



# WATER QUALITY

## PROTECTING OUR AQUATIC ENVIRONMENT

SPECIES	2017	2018	COMMENT
Salmon	<i>'Do you have an annual monitoring report that includes analysis of water column surveys?'</i>		
	Discharges	94%	82%



# WASTE

## MANAGING WASTE RESPONSIBLY

SPECIES	2017	2018	COMMENT
All	<i>'Have staff been trained in best practice measures to eliminate farming debris?'</i>		
	Farm debris	62%	76%
	<i>'Do you record the amount of waste (in tonnes and/or m<sup>3</sup>) taken to landfill annually?'</i>		
	Waste audit	22%	33%

*"We're re-using feed bags, using paper bags not plastic, reducing the number of soy sauce and wasabi sachets we put out and replacing these with large soy sauce and wasabi sachets"*

**High Country Salmon**

*"We monitor the Hoteo River and remove much of the debris which washes down such as old maimai. This forms a significant part of the cubic meters of rubbish we pay to have disposed of each year"*

**Biomarine**

*"We're starting down the road toward complete transition to single seed production on net bags so sticks, posts and rails, our biggest waste items, will be eliminated from our business"*

**Mahurangi Oysters**

*"We're using a basket/longline system that both improves waterflow through the farms and prevents the accumulation of debris under the stock. We don't use single use plastic in our farming operation"*

**Waiheke Marine Farms**

*"Trials continuing with lashing and ropes that can be composted. Sanford is working towards Zero Plastic, and minimising waste through the product and materials we use, training and recycling. We carry out over 150 beach cleans in Marlborough per year, and include agencies such as DOC and the Graeme Dingle Foundation (with the school kids) in some of these clean ups"*

**Sanford**



## RESOURCES

### USING RESOURCES EFFICIENTLY

SPECIES	2017	2018	COMMENT	
All	<i>'Do you record the amount of fuel used across your farming operation annually?'</i>			
	Energy	76%	67%	There is still room for improvement in energy/ carbon awareness – we will be helping the industry with tools to encourage this
Salmon	<i>'Do you source feed from suppliers who source sustainable raw materials and are independently certified?'</i>			
	Feed	100%	100%	Sustainable feed sources are essential to the industry's values and success
Mussels	<i>'Have you participated in any programmes to restore ecosystems (eg restoration of mussel beds in Hauraki Gulf)?'</i>			
	Ecosystem services	69%	81%	Mussel farmers are increasingly engaging in ways to harness the positive effects of mussels on the ecosystem
Oysters	<i>'Do you participate in any programmes to restore ecosystems?'</i>			
	Ecosystem services	5%	68%	Oyster farmers are increasingly engaging in ways to harness the positive effects of oysters on the ecosystem



## FOOD SAFETY

### SAFE AND ETHICAL SEAFOOD

SPECIES	2017	2018	COMMENT	
All	<i>'Have all harvesting and farming staff received training in food safety and harvesting requirements?'</i>			
	Food safety	99%	95%	This reflects a greater number of operators choosing not to answer this question – we will be adjusting the checklists to make all questions compulsory
Salmon	<i>'Have you prepared a fish health management plan?'</i>			
	Animal welfare	96%	100%	Animal welfare practices are essential to the industry's values and success







# IWI PARTICIPATION

## RESPECT IWI VALUES

SPECIES	2017	2018	COMMENT
All	'Do you proactively engage with your local Iwi?'		
Iwi participation	New	88%	New question in 2018

"We provide mussels for tangi and hui"  
**Just Mussels**

"We support the Bluff marae and provide the use of our facilities for meetings"  
**Sanford**

"We support Te Ahi Kaa, a Coromandel whanau-based Maori service organisation"  
**Goldridge**



# COMMUNITY

## RESPECT FOR OUR COMMUNITIES

SPECIES	2017	2018	COMMENT
All	'Does your maintenance programme seek to ensure that farms are kept as tidy and well maintained as possible?'		
Visual effects	99%	100%	Farmers are very aware of the need to keep farms tidy and minimise visual effects
Mussels	'Do you have practices and training to manage noise?'		
Noise	68%	94%	Farmers are very aware of the need to minimise noise
All	'Please provide examples of your community engagement; local meetings, festivals'		
Communication	See examples of community engagement initiatives below		

"We are committed to paying our employees the living wage rather than the minimum wage"  
**New Zealand King Salmon**

"We donate a line of mussels to support Golden Bay High School"  
**Clearwater Mussels**

"We support the Twizel Salmon and Wine Festival, Take a Kid Fishing, school prizes, donations to St John, and we provide staff assistance with maintenance of the local gymnasium"  
**Mt Cook Alpine Salmon**

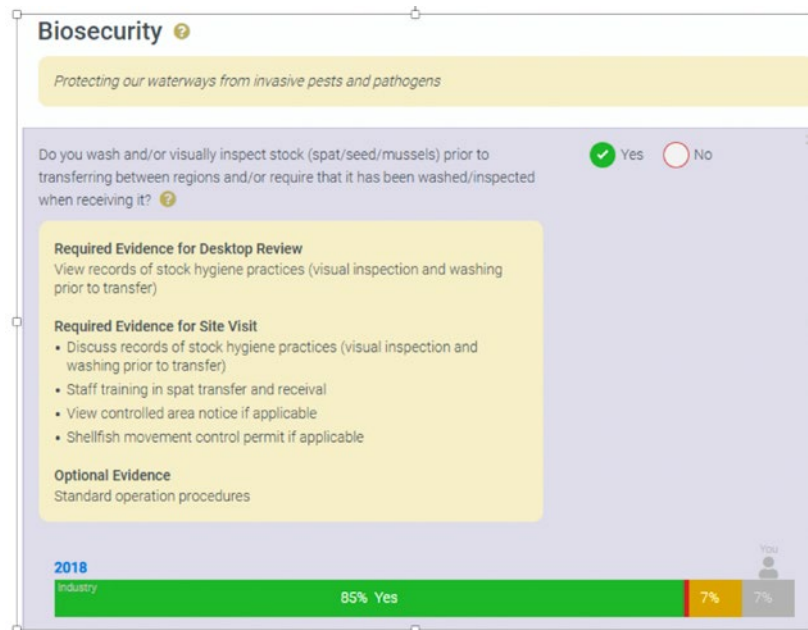
"We support the Wainui Good Folk Festival, the Akaroa Area School and the Akaroa Volunteer Fire Brigade. Our used nets have been offered on Facebook to locals and probably 50% have been taken up so far. Bulk bags are also frequently taken by locals"  
**Akaroa Salmon**


# BUILDING OUR TOOLKIT

## DASHBOARD

This year we've progressed three initiatives to build the A+ toolkit across the industry. The most substantial is the additional features we've added to the A+ dashboard. The A+ online checklists have been updated on to a new platform to assist with question consistency and version control between the species groups. The new platform has also incorporated the A+ verification assessment protocol, evidence required and numbering sequence to assist companies when completing the on-line checklists and during the verification process by the third-party assessor.

We'll be reviewing the dashboard to make sure that the checklist questions are accurately recording progress (or the need for it) from year to year. We need to make sure we allow farmers to select 'not applicable' answers where these are indicated but make sure they can't just select it as a default instead of answering yes or no. We are aiming to maximise consistency in the questions from year to year so we can really start to track progress and respond accordingly.



 <b>Mussel Farmer On-Water Guide</b>	
<p>This On-Water Guide is a summary of the on-water related elements of the A+ Best Management Practices. It provides on-water staff with a quick reference for day to day operation. Farm Managers should also be familiar with the full Best Management Practices in the A+ Sustainable Management Framework <a href="http://www.aplusaquaculture.nz">www.aplusaquaculture.nz</a></p>	
<b>Stock Transfer</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stock (spat/seed) transferred between regions should be declumped/washed and inspected, so that it is free of visible biofouling to the extent practicable</li> <li>Where required by resource consent, or industry protocols, it may be appropriate to apply or investigate additional treatments to mitigate stock transfer risk</li> <li>Rejects at the destination should be returned to land disposal</li> <li>Take care during transfers regarding contaminants e.g. very careful washing and sorting prior to shifting</li> <li>Take care to ensure mussels are appropriately protected from excessive heat and sunlight while they are out of the water</li> <li>Records should be kept of all stock transfers, including transfer date, amount and location, and whether de-clumping/washing (or other treatment) was undertaken</li> </ul>
<b>Equipment Transfer to Ensure Biosecurity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where feasible, do not transfer equipment such as ropes, floats, bins, bags and footwear between regions</li> <li>Where equipment is transferred, treat it prior to transfer using any feasible methods. A simple method is air drying for at least one month before transfer</li> <li>Keep records of all equipment transfers, including transfer date, amount/type and location, and the nature of any sterilisation treatment undertaken</li> </ul>
<b>General Biosecurity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Become familiar with, and display on all vessels, the MPI 'New Zealand's Marine Pest Identification Guide'</li> <li>Upon the discovery of any suspected new or notifiable pest (e.g. <i>Styela</i>), disease, or unusual mortality:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Note exact location, date &amp; time and take a photo and sample where possible</li> <li>Keep samples shaded, cool and wet by containing (in a plastic bag or other container) with a small amount of seawater</li> <li>Keep records of any mortalities</li> <li>Phone the MPI Exotic Pest and Disease Hotline 0800 80 99 66, and follow any resulting recommendations</li> </ul> </li> <li>From time to time the industry may develop protocols related to specific pests or diseases. Operators will comply with requirements relating to these as advised in writing by AQNZ</li> <li>Minimise opportunities for fouling of structures and equipment</li> </ul>

## PROCUREMENT POLICIES

For companies that aren't farming themselves there's still a way they can support A+ through adopting the A+ procurement policy. This ensures that all the product they are sourcing is from farmers that are active members of A+.

## ON-WATER GUIDES

For mussel and oyster farmers we've developed a set of handy portable 'on-water guides' that summarise the industry best practices for easy day to day reference and to aid as a training tool.

# ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

A+ is first and foremost an industry improvement programme – there will always be ways to refine both our practices and the framework that guides those practices. This year we have identified five key areas for future focus:

## TRAINING

Building on the creation of the on-water guides, we'll be providing support and encouragement across the industry to ensure the A+ practices are understood and met across all aspects of the industry. We'll be working with the industry in various formats to make sure that we are talking together on an ongoing basis about what works best, what industry knowledge is yet untapped, and how best we can share that knowledge amongst industry.

## MANAGEMENT PLANS AND POLICIES

For our industry to be resilient, we'll be providing support and working together to draft standardised species-specific templates for policies and management plans to help companies obtain best practises. Templates will be used to create company specific management plans and policies relevant to their farming operations.

## BIOSECURITY

On the water, protecting our crops from pests and pathogens is a priority for the industry and we're working on developing species-specific biosecurity standards which will better inform our A+ practices and key performance indicators. The salmon standards are already agreed and will be folded into A+ in the 2020 review. The mussel and oyster standards will come soon after.

## ENERGY

We're looking at conducting life cycle analyses for the three species to highlight areas that the industry can focus on to reduce its carbon footprint. We'll build in practices, tools and key performance indicators in line with these once they are complete.

## WASTE AUDIT

Understanding our waste streams is an important element of reducing them – we've identified that industry might benefit from more support in this area. We'll be looking at tools that might make this easier on a day to day basis such as downloadable worksheets or apps.

## 2020 – FIVE YEAR REVIEW

September 2020 will mark the five-year anniversary of A+ and in line with our continuous improvement ethos we'll be conducting a full review of the programme. The review will include a look at the underpinning risk assessments, making sure the management practices are our best and most up to date, and refining the checklist metrics and dashboard to make it as easy as possible to track our progress. We'll be looking for input and suggestions from a range of key stakeholders including farmers, regulators, Iwi and environmental groups. We'll also be reviewing the A+ website so industry and the community can be regularly updated and engaged.



NEW ZEALAND  
**Sustainable**  
**AQUACULTURE**

