



SUSTAINABILITY  
REPORT 2023





## INTRODUCTION

Sustainability is a fundamental principle in the aquaculture industry, a fact that is well understood by the individuals working tirelessly on the water every day. Our farmers depend on pristine, clean waters to cultivate the high-quality products we enjoy. Their close connection to the environment positions them at the forefront of monitoring our aquatic ecosystems. With their knowledge of the waters they operate in, they play a pivotal role in developing and implementing strategies for best farming practices, biosecurity measures, and environmentally conscious management of our precious marine resources. It is with great pleasure that we present the sustainability report for 2023, which showcases the industry's commitment to continuous improvement.

Over the past few years, the aquaculture industry in Aotearoa has achieved noteworthy successes in enhancing sustainability. The confirmation of our King salmon's sustainability credentials through a comprehensive Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) revealed a carbon footprint comparable to poultry and eggs, underscoring our commitment to reducing environmental impact. Our sector has also garnered recognition in the form of finalists and winners in the MPI sustainability awards, selected for their sustainable innovations and initiatives. Furthermore, our three species have maintained the prestigious "Best Choice" ranking under the Monterey Bay Seafood Watch programme. In addition, we have made significant strides in enhancing the quality and implementation of our biosecurity standards, setting the benchmark for biosecurity management in Aotearoa.

The A+ Sustainability Programme has recently placed considerable emphasis on enhancing its quality for farmers, aiming to improve engagement and the implementation process. Our focus has been on providing farmers with detailed feedback and valuable resources to streamline improvement initiatives. We are conducting thorough reviews of our foundational sustainable management frameworks, aligning them with best practices and practical implementation methods. Gathering feedback from farmers has been a priority, enabling us to understand their processes, challenges, and areas requiring assistance. This valuable input will inform the future direction of the programme, maximizing its impact.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our farmers for their dedication and for exemplifying the potential achieved through collaboration, hard work, and respect for the environment that sustains our livelihoods. Let us continue to lead the charge in adopting and promoting best practices, maintaining the momentum to further enhance our environmental credentials.





# WHAT IS A+

A+ is a world-leading continuous improvement programme for the New Zealand aquaculture industry built on Sustainable Management Frameworks (SMFs). These frameworks are founded on the same standards and principles as international environmental certifications such as Best Aquaculture Practices (BAP), Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC), and others. However, in contrast, the frameworks provide a platform for progressing farmers to best practice and beyond through continuous improvement.

## A+ SEEKS TO:



A+ follows a structure of assessing and checking practices both internally and using external verifiers. Annual information provided by farmers helps us to report on industry progress, implement changes, and develop resources to help support industry sustainability efforts.



## WHAT DO WE REPORT?

Each year our farmers complete a digital checklist of questions which enables us to track individual performance across a range of environmental metrics. Questions cover issues such as compliance with environmental legislation, staff welfare, biosecurity, animal welfare, and waste management. Answers to these questions enable us to identify areas where industry performs well, or where additional support is required.

## KEY AREAS ASSESSED ARE:



The reporting criteria are based on the reporting structure and requirements listed in our Sustainable Management Frameworks (SMF). These provide greater detail about the questions we ask farmers.

## HOW DO WE VERIFY THE PROGRAMME?

Third party verification is an important component of maintaining programme integrity and ensures continual improvement. It also provides valuable guidance for our farmers, and for the A+ programme itself.

Our independent third-party verifier, Nautilus Collaboration, conducts verification assessments for a portion of farmers each year. The verifier goes through a checklist of questions with the farmers to benchmark their progress against our standards and provide guidance on best practice.

“This programme is a credit to Aquaculture New Zealand, and the broader New Zealand industry, and more programmes like this would be beneficial to be implemented in other parts of the world where such programmes do not exist.”

– Nautilus Collaboration



## OUR SUSTAINABILITY CREDENTIALS

Although A+ acknowledges the continuous need for improvement, we take pride in our industry's already minimal environmental impact. Our industry has received international recognition through the Monterey Bay Seafood Watch Programme, which evaluates seafood industries around the world. We take pride in maintaining the “best choice” status for all three of our farmed species, which is the highest endorsement granted by this Programme.



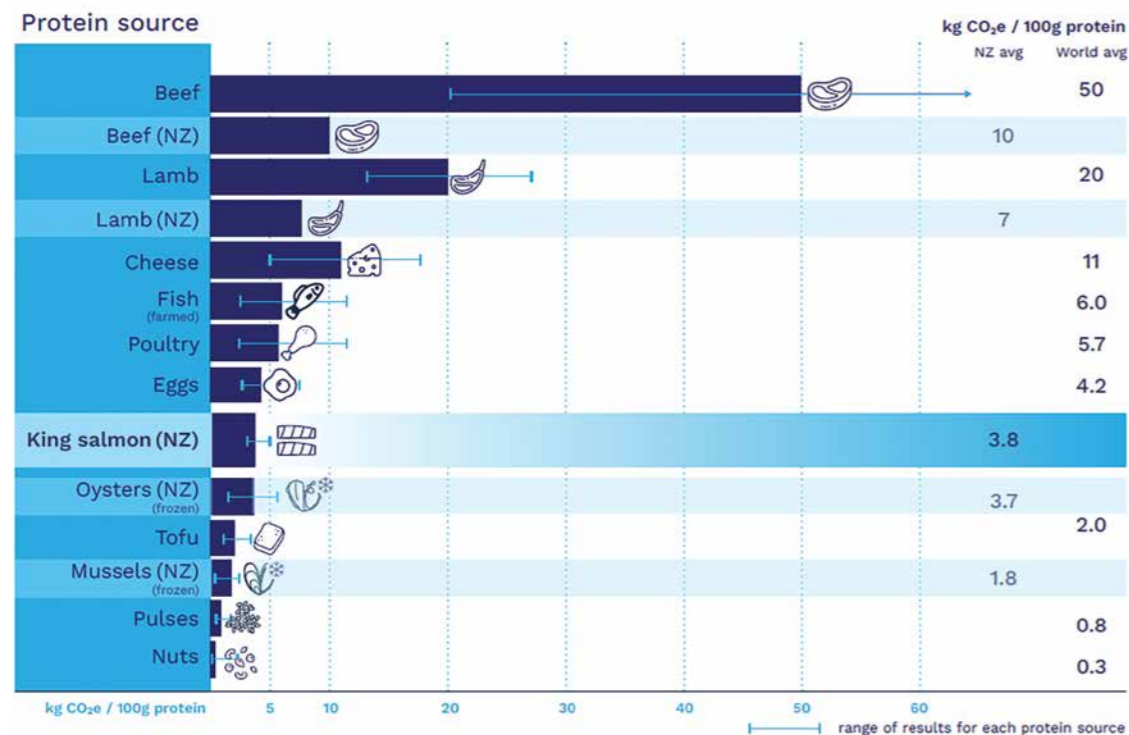
Recent Life Cycle Assessments of our farmed species have supported our sustainability story, highlighting that

**our salmon, oysters, and mussels are some of the most carbon-efficient animal protein sources on the planet.** A Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) study by the independent research group thinkstep-anz showed that NZ-farmed King salmon have among the lowest carbon footprints of animal proteins farmed in both Aotearoa and the world. Our King salmon has a similar carbon footprint per 100 grams of protein to that of eggs, oysters, and poultry. Based on their findings, it was determined that the primary source of carbon emissions in the salmon farming industry was attributed to the production and transportation of salmon feed. It has been recommended that enhancing feeding efficiency and substituting current feed ingredients with lower carbon alternatives has the potential to yield additional reductions in the carbon footprint associated with New Zealand's salmon farming industry.



Additionally, a previous LCA on our farmed shellfish showed that farmed NZ Greenshell™ mussels have a carbon footprint akin to plant proteins such as tofu. **This is amongst the lowest carbon footprint of any animal protein in the world.**

Carbon footprint of different dietary proteins on the global market - production to retail only



\* The carbon footprints of the oysters and mussels come from thinkstep-anz (2021). The carbon footprints of New Zealand beef and lamb are from Beef and Lamb NZ (2022), converted to per 100g protein. The other nutritional proteins come from global production data from Poore and Nemecek (2018). All products are shown using a system boundary that spans from farming to retail.

The results for salmon are for domestic distribution. The bars are used to show the tenth and ninetieth percentiles (the range within which 80% of producers will fall). These bars indicate the range of results for a particular protein source, due to different production methods, technologies, and locations.

# REPORTING ON KEY METRICS

## A+ MEMBERSHIP – CURRENT ACTIVE MEMBERS



### MUSSELS

- Aotea Marine Farms
- Apex Marine Farms
- Aroma Aquaculture
- Cedenco
- Clearwater Mussels
- Crail Bay Aquaculture
- Gold Ridge Marine Farms
- Gulf Mussel Farms
- MacLab
- Marine Farm Management Ltd
- Nelson Ranger Fishing Company
- North Island Mussels
- Paddy Bull Marine Farms
- Port Aquaculture
- Port Underwood Contracting
- Rough Waters Ltd
- Sanford
- Te Atiawa LLP Aquaculture
- Waimana Marine Ltd
- Wakatotea Mussels Opotiki
- Westpac Mussels



### SALMON

- Akaroa Salmon
- High Country Salmon
- Mt Cook Alpine Salmon
- NZ King Salmon
- Salmon Smolt NZ
- Sanford



### OYSTERS

- Biomarine
- Clevedon Coast Oysters
- Coast Oysters
- Flamingo Oysters
- Hutchings and Addison
- Ika Marine Ltd
- Mahurangi Oysters
- Marlborough Oysters
- Moana NZ
- NZ Oyster Company
- Opete Creek
- Rodney and Daphne Cranwell
- Saltwater Workshop
- Sea Products 1998 Ltd
- Seafort Holdings Ltd
- Taniwha Oysters
- Waiheke Marine Farms

### PROCUREMENT

- Aquarius Fisheries
- Clevedon Coast Oysters
- Doetsch Grether AG
- Mills Bay Mussels
- Omega Seafoods
- OmegaFlex NZ
- OP Columbia
- Sea Products Mussels Ltd
- Talley's







## COMPLIANCE

The regulatory systems responsible for environmental management in Aotearoa are robust and cover a wide range of environmental concerns. Farmers must adhere to a high minimum standard under the Resource Management Act and regional resource consenting.

Additionally, some of our farmers hold international environmental certifications which require compliance that encompasses strict environmental parameters and systems.



## ECOLOGY

Our farmers prioritise the maintenance of our natural ecosystems with many going above and beyond minimum environmental requirements to ensure any environmental impacts remain minor.

## BIOSECURITY

The industry-led A+ biosecurity standards set the expectations for biosecurity management across all aquaculture throughout NZ. Companies are increasing their adoption of biosecurity management plans under the standards and continue to improve their monitoring and reporting systems. As kaitiaki of the waters, farmers understand the importance of biosecurity management, are vigilant in checking for pests and diseases on farm, and liaise closely with AQNZ and Biosecurity NZ around management and response.

91% OF OUR SALMON COMES FROM INTERNATIONALLY CERTIFIED BEST AQUACULTURE PRACTICES (BAP) FARMERS.



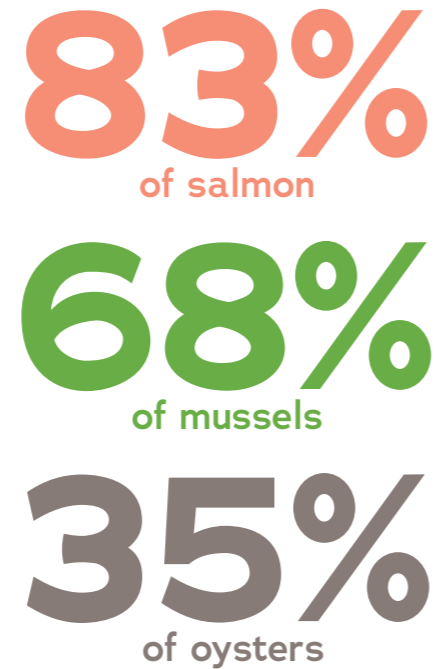
84%

OF OUR FARMS ARE NOW COVERED BY A COMPREHENSIVE BIOSECURITY MANAGEMENT PLAN WHICH MEETS THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE INDUSTRY A+ BIOSECURITY STANDARDS.



## WILDLIFE

Aquaculture is not only known to be low risk to wildlife but is also beneficial by providing habitat structures and foraging grounds. We continue to recognise the importance of ensuring farming practices do not pose any unnecessary or preventable risk to wildlife. Wildlife management plans are in the process of being implemented across industry.



produced in New Zealand are covered by a Wildlife Management Plan including staff training on wildlife interactions and awareness.

2021 Seabird Incidents: 28  
2022 Seabird Incidents: 26  
2021 Marine Mammal Incidents: 0  
2022 Marine Mammal Incidents: 3

A huge effort is made by our farmers each year to support restoration and protection of natural ecosystems. Pest control is a huge component of supporting natural systems in Aotearoa and many farmers support pest control initiatives in their regions. Additionally, many farmers are directly involved in ecosystem restoration projects and initiatives, such as restoring natural shellfish habitats.



are actively involved in natural ecosystem restoration research projects or initiatives.

## CRESTED GREBE

At the High Country Salmon farm and floating café in Twizel, New Zealand, an extraordinary love story is unfolding. Three pairs of endangered crested grebes, known as kāmāna, have chosen this picturesque location to build their nests and raise their families. Visitors to the farm now have the rare opportunity to witness these beautiful and elusive birds up close, offering an intimate and unexpected encounter with wild birdlife.

The grebes were initially attracted to the calm waters of the farm's canal and the abundance of food available. When one pair tried to nest in a busy area, the farm staff came to their aid by creating a floating wooden platform for them. The grebes eagerly embraced this assistance, grateful that half of their nest-building work was already done.

Tracey Gunn, the Business Operations Manager, expresses her excitement about the grebes' presence and the joy of observing their dedicated efforts to build their nests. She encourages visitors not to miss the chance to see these birds up close. The adorable sight of parents carrying their stripey chicks on their backs until they are old enough to fend for themselves adds to the overall charm of the experience.

The Department of Conservation acknowledges the popularity of the native birdlife at the farm and has installed a board to showcase it to visitors. Crested grebes, with a population of fewer than 1000 birds and a vulnerable conservation status in New Zealand, face challenges from predators and habitat loss, making their presence at the farm all the more significant.



“We were proudly one of the first companies to engage in the initiative with MFA/NIWA to restore traditional mussel beds on various sites around the Sounds and remain committed to this programme.

– Aroma

We are a proud key sponsor for the Te Wahi Whakatupuranga Māori Trust environment restoration programme based in Wairangi Bay which is focussed on pest eradication.

– Marlborough Oysters





## WATER QUALITY

Clean water is critical to the success of aquaculture and is of great concern to our farmers. We have strict legislation ensuring that water quality is maintained. Discharge limitations and controls are set during consenting as per regional requirements. These thorough processes ensure that effects on water quality are minimised. The A+ programme requires farmers to mitigate additional risk of accidental discharge or spills and encourages the use of formalised spill plans and registers.

**83%** of our salmon farmers    **58%** of our mussel farmers    **23%** of our oyster farmers

have already adopted a spill response plan and record and train their staff in spill response procedure.

## THE ECOSYSTEM SERVICES OF AQUACULTURE

A NIWA report by Stenton-Dozey and Broekhuizen (2019) investigated the ecological effects of mussel farming in NZ and found that farms provided substantial benefits to the surrounding environment. Several key benefits of mussel farming were identified:

### 1. Habitat Creation

Mussel farms create valuable habitat in coastal waters and biodiversity in and around mussel farms is higher than in surrounding waters.

### 2. Mitigating Nutrients from Human Activities

Mussels filter vast amounts of nutrients associated with eutrophication from the water. These nutrients wash down the rivers from other human activities and are filtered when they reach the mussel farms.

### 4. Mitigating the Effects of Natural Mussel Bed Destruction

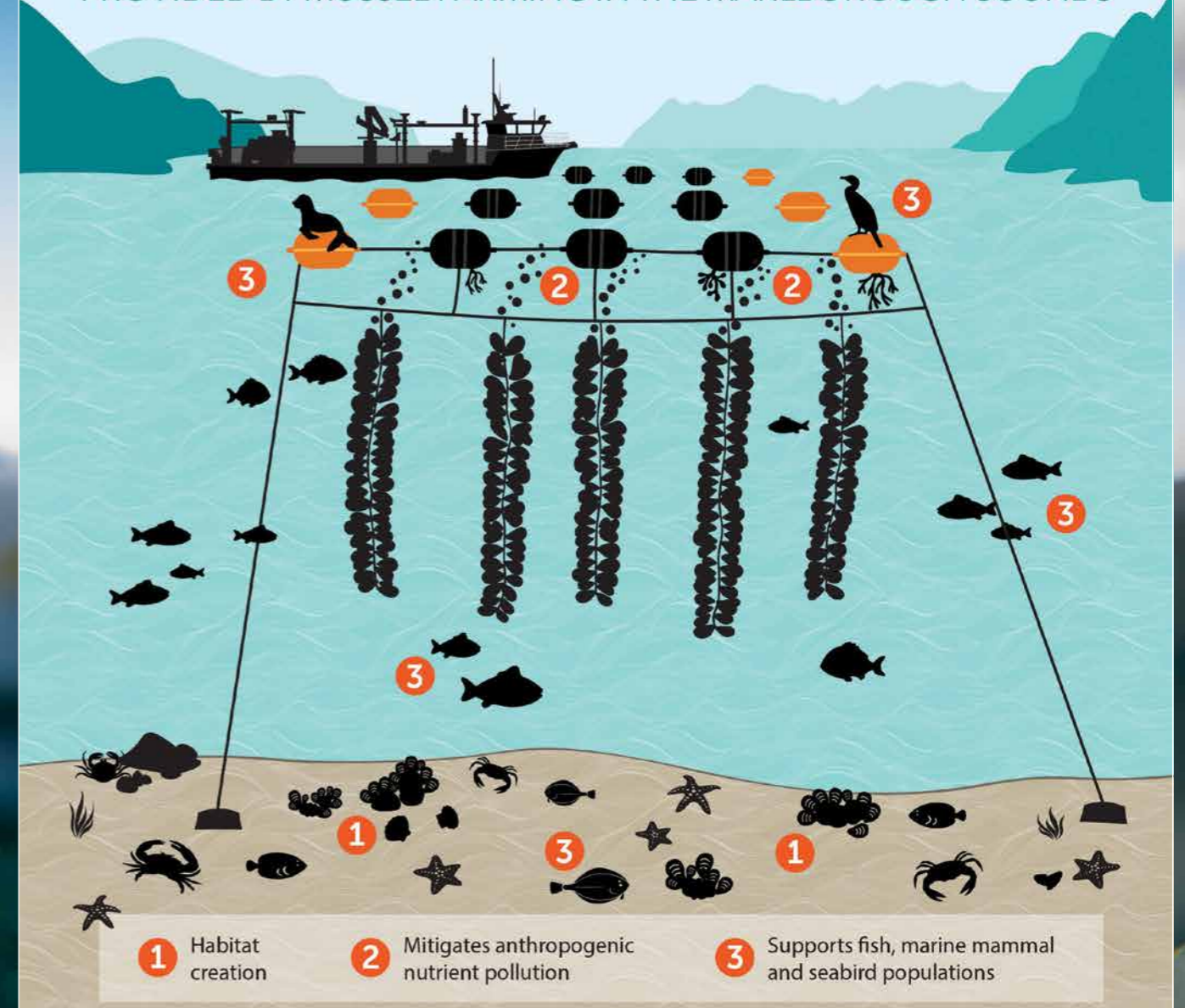
Historically there were large natural mussel reefs that provided many of the ecosystems services associated with mussel farms. These were destroyed through dredging, trawling, and sedimentation, and mussel farms are helping fill the gap left by those habitats being removed.

### 3. Supporting Populations of Fish, Marine Mammals, and Seabirds

Numerous species are positively affected by mussel farms as they provide both a resting space and a hunting ground abundant with food for fish, marine mammals, and seabirds.

# ECOLOGICAL & ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

PROVIDED BY MUSSEL FARMING IN THE MARLBOROUGH SOUNDS



- 1** Habitat creation
- 2** Mitigates anthropogenic nutrient pollution
- 3** Supports fish, marine mammal and seabird populations

- 1** Habitat Creation: Mussel farms create three-dimensional habitat in the seawater column and on the seabed. Biodiversity in and around mussel farms is higher. The current industry scale is estimated to be similar to historic (now destroyed) wild mussel beds.
- 2** Mitigates nutrients created by other human activities: The mussels on mussel farms filter and clean similar volumes of water to historic wild mussel beds as well as removing nitrogen products from the water column. Mussel harvests remove approximately 50% of the nitrogen load originating from rivers flowing into the Sounds.
- 3** Supports fish, marine mammal, and seabird populations: Mussel farms provide direct benefit to marine life by providing habitat, food, and roosting/resting structures. Common and Bottlenose dolphins use farm structures to herd their prey (schools of fish), seal and seabirds use flotation equipment to roost. Recreational fish are always present around mussel farms but feed more actively during seeding and harvesting (and thereby attracting recreational fishers).





## WASTE

Waste reporting, management, and reduction is key to understanding the impacts of operating any business, as well as tracking and driving improvements. Reducing waste is a key focus for farmers and huge efforts have been made across industry to investigate solutions and innovations to address waste.

**100%** of our companies regularly complete staff training aimed at minimalising debris production and debris lost to the marine environment.

The average amount of recyclable waste successfully recycled by our farmers is **89% for salmon**, **87% for oysters**, and **59% for mussels**.

**67%** of our salmon farmers, **54%** of our oyster farmers, and **42%** of our mussel farmers have made switches to plastic-free alternatives in their companies and practices.

**83%** of our salmon farmers, **31%** of our oyster farmers, and **79%** of our mussel farmers record how much waste they send to landfill each year.

**2021 Tonnes of waste sent to landfill: 3209**  
**2022 Tonnes of waste sent to landfill: 3518**

2022 witnessed an increase in waste outputs as a result of climate events, namely heat waves and storms, which adversely affected farming operations in New Zealand. The industry recognizes the urgency of conducting research and implementing initiatives to effectively address and mitigate climate risks moving forward.

**67%** of our salmon farmers, **54%** of our oyster farmers, and **48%** of our mussel farmers have formalised plans for how to appropriately dispose of all landed organic and inorganic waste.



## BEACH CLEANS

It is of vital importance that we keep not only the waters, but all coastal ecosystems free of rubbish. Our industry completes hundreds of beach cleans each year to help achieve this goal.



**538** beach cleans completed by the aquaculture industry across the motu in 2021.



**564** beach cleans completed by the aquaculture industry across the motu in 2022.



## FLIPFARM WINS THE GSA GLOBAL AQUACULTURE INNOVATION AWARD (2021)

In 2021, FlipFarm Systems, based in New Zealand, received international recognition by winning the Global Seafood Alliance's Innovation award. Their revolutionary oyster farming techniques have set a new standard in the industry and have gained popularity around the world. FlipFarms have proven to be environmentally beneficial, demonstrating how innovation can support sustainability in aquaculture.

One of the key features of FlipFarm systems is their durability, significantly reducing equipment loss in oyster farming. This has led to a substantial reduction in inorganic waste streams, with only "household" rubbish left for disposal. Additionally, the system minimizes the colonization of fouling organisms on the structures, resulting in nearly zero organic waste.

An unexpected positive outcome of FlipFarms is the positive impact on the workforce. By reducing the manual labor requirements, FlipFarms have made oyster farming more accessible to a broader demographic and improved staff welfare.

Overall, FlipFarm Systems' innovative approach to oyster farming has not only garnered international recognition but also proved to be environmentally friendly and beneficial for the industry's workforce.

We have purchased a wool press to enable us to compact down our feedbags and then ship them to a local recycling company which is turning our feed bags into useful plastic products. This is a huge improvement for us this year as feed bags have been by far our biggest waste item with approximately 2000 feed bags used each year.

- Akaroa Salmon

"The FlipFarm System we use has no sacrificial components and therefore produces virtually no waste. The only waste taken off the farms is household waste which is less than 5kg per week. We have recycling bins at our grading shed to separate waste."

- Marlborough Oysters

"Our goal is to deploy all primary seed on to biodegradable ties for the 2024 season. We have trials in the water now."

- Waimana Marine





## RESOURCES

The efficient management of resources can significantly reduce environmental impacts. We encourage farmers to implement comprehensive records of resource management so that they may track their efficiencies and improvements.

**83% of our salmon farmers, 74% of our mussel farmers, and 69% of our oyster farmers** record the amount of fuel they use each year, tracking this over time.

**83%**

of our salmon farmers

**70%**

of our mussel farmers

**46%**

of our oyster farmers

can show how they account for energy efficiency in their planning and operations.

Future proofing and maintaining farm infrastructure is paramount in avoiding resource and energy costs associated with repairs as a consequence of natural disasters. Industry recognises the need to be proactive in response to the climate-driven increases in extreme weather events.

**83% of our salmon farmers, 77% of our oyster farmers, and 61% of our mussel farmers** have a formal contingency response plan for any loss or damage of farm structures for use in events such as storms.



## AQUACULTURE FEED

Feed is one of the largest expenses and most significant environmental considerations of fish farming. It is important that feeds all come from sustainable sources and suppliers.

**100%**

of our salmon farmers source their feed from reputable independently certified suppliers who only use sustainable raw materials.

## SEAFOOD STARS WINNERS ANNOUNCED

The Seafood Star Awards were recently held at the Seafood New Zealand Conference in Wellington. **Akaroa Salmon New Zealand received the Future Adaptation Award for their sustainable salmon farming practices**, including the use of innovative feed called AlgaPrime derived from sugar cane waste and fermented Algal oil. Algaprime provides Omega 3's to the feed and reduces the amount of wild caught fish needed in feed supply whilst improving fish health.

**Ben Pierce and Annie Fleming were both honoured with the Young Achiever Award** for their positive contributions to the seafood industry. Ben Pierce co-founded Young Fish NZ, a networking group for young professionals, while Annie Fleming (Talleys) was recognized for her dedication to sustainability and the environment.



## TUK-TUKS GET GREEN LIGHT ON SALMON FARM

Electric tuk-tuks are transforming transportation in McKenzie Country and benefitting a local salmon farm's sustainability effort. **Mt Cook Alpine Salmon** introduced four electric tuk-tuks in 2022 to evaluate their suitability for salmon farming. Due to their success, eight more tuk-tuks are on their way from China to the McKenzie basin. The tuk-tuks have proven reliable, safe, and efficient, and have replaced older fuel-powered farm vehicles. With this change, the farm expects a reduction in fuel costs by nearly \$20,000 annually and a 24-tonne reduction in carbon footprint. The tuk-tuks do not require licenses or registration, allowing non-licensed farm staff to move independently. The next step is to explore a six-seater people mover for staff transportation on private roads, replacing larger fuel-powered vehicles. Overall, the tuk-tuks have improved efficiency, reduced risks, and enhanced the working experience on the farms.

As part of our emissions reduction process, whenever submitting business cases for new equipment and vehicles, the energy savings (fuel, CO2e) must be included for consideration. We have invested in a fleet of 14 Electric Vehicles for on-farm operations.

- Mount Cook Alpine Salmon





## FOOD SAFETY & ANIMAL HEALTH

It is well known that animal welfare and product quality go hand in hand, and both are key priorities for our farmers. Food safety is highly regulated in Aotearoa and all farmers must adhere to strict harvest and product management requirements. The key to managing food safety and health is the ability to trace products back to the source, as well as regular health checks.

# 100%

**of our shellfish farmers have met all reporting requirements under the Bivalve Molluscan Shellfish Regulated Control Scheme.**

**of our farmers can trace their products to individual farm sites in the event of an issue.**

**of our salmon farmers have a fish health plan and staff training on maintaining fish health and welfare.**

Monitoring best practice requires high standards of record keeping and monitoring health trends. Our industry continues to implement ongoing records tracking animal health and welfare.

**100%**  
of our salmon farmers

**47%**  
of our mussel farmers

**46%**  
of our oyster farmers

have record keeping systems for tracking animal health, disease, and mortality trends over time.



## IWI PARTICIPATION

As well as being active participants in Aotearoa's aquaculture industry, Iwi across the motu are leading in new and innovative sustainable farming initiatives, like open ocean farming and new species. Māori have ownership interests in a major portion of our seafood farming businesses. The A+ programme reflects kaitiakitanga and manaakitanga values and encourages ongoing engagement with local Iwi as mana whenua in decision-making and with respect to local tikanga.

**84%**  
of salmon

**51%**  
of mussels

**55%**  
of oysters

grown in New Zealand come from companies owned or partially owned by Iwi.

\*Does not include many private Whānau or hapū owned farming ventures.



**67%**  
of our salmon farmers

**63%**  
of our mussel farmers

**38%**  
of our oyster farmers

have actively engaged with Iwi groups over the past year.

\*Number represents formal documented Iwi engagement – additional informal engagement is not necessarily captured.





## COMMUNITY

He aha te mea nui o tea ao? He tāngata, he tāngata, he tāngata.

Sustainable best practice requires care for both the environment and the people. We are incredibly proud of how our industry supports and is supported by their communities and staff. Our farmers sponsor numerous environmental initiatives, sports clubs, school groups, and charities, and regularly supply fresh product for community events. Community engagement ranges from supporting Santa parades to koha for tangi and hui.

The number of community events and meetings across our farming regions that our farmers have contributed to or attended in the last 2 years:

Waikato	77	Canterbury	33	BOP	35
Marlborough	81	Northland	22	Southland	20
Nelson Bays	40	Auckland	25	<b>Total</b>	<b>309</b>



Staff welfare is also a huge priority, with a strong focus on health and wellbeing and providing quality employment across the industry. Hundreds of people are employed in the on-water operations of aquaculture alone. These roles support and are supported by thousands of other jobs across areas such as seafood processing, freight, retail, marketing, and hospitality.

Number of staff employed in farming operations by A+ farmers:

<b>Mussels</b>	<b>Salmon</b>	<b>Oysters</b>
<b>371</b>	<b>185</b>	<b>151</b>

**100%** of our farmers are compliant with NZ Health and Safety legislation.

**100%** of our farmers are compliant with NZ Employment legislation.

## MUSSELING UP WITH MIKE EXPLORING THE CHALLENGES OF WORKING AT SEA

Mike Holland has dedicated over 30 years of his life to working at sea. Starting as a deckhand in 1988, he worked his way up to become a skipper for a mussel harvesting company. After the company was sold, Mike transitioned to the role of Operations Manager for Clearwater Mussels.

Reflecting on his early days at sea, Mike remembers the difficulties of being away from his family for extended periods of time. He recalls a heartbreaking moment when he returned home to find his daughter, who was just a few months old at the time, crying because she didn't recognize him.

Fortunately, companies like Talley's have implemented a more balanced work schedule for their harvest crews, allowing for a better work-life balance and reduced fatigue. This four-day-on, four-day-off schedule has greatly improved the lives of workers in the industry.

Recognizing the challenges faced by individuals working in the seafood industry, Mike joined First Mate as a navigator. First Mate provides independent and confidential support to anyone in the industry who may be struggling. As a navigator, Mike utilizes his experience and understanding of the industry to offer practical advice and direct individuals to the appropriate resources for support.

First Mate's navigators have firsthand experience in the seafood sector and understand the unique challenges faced by workers. They are trained to provide assistance in various areas, including dealing with regulations, building business resilience, and managing personal life while being away at sea.

Individuals in need of support or guidance can reach out to First Mate by calling 0800 ADRIFT (0800 237 438). First Mate offers a friendly ear, confidential advice, and connections to other sources of help when needed.



We provide a free anonymous mental health and wellbeing support service to all staff. Dedicated support is provided for work related accidents and incidents to support rehabilitation and a positive return to the workplace.

- Sanford

The safety of our marine farming team is paramount, we have all crew members put through a first aid course. From a wellbeing perspective the company provides subsidised accommodation close to the port for some crew, we provide a van which transports Ōpōtiki-based staff daily to Whakatane Wharf and back and we also provide cooked meals for all staff on our vessels, at the land base and the processing facility.

- Whakatōhea Mussels



# A+ VERIFICATION, PROGRESS, AND IMPROVEMENTS

Our verifier produces a technical report each year summarising the observations and results from the annual verification assessments. The findings of the report enable AQNZ to improve the programme and track progress. We also gather feedback from the farmers each year on how they find the programme and what AQNZ can do to support them to improve.

In the last 2 years we have externally assessed:

**4 mussel companies, 2 oyster companies, 1 salmon company.**

Here is a summary of key verifier feedback from the last two years of verification and how AQNZ has improved the programme in response.

**The verifier made recommendations to increase farmer understanding of the verification process and requirements, including greater time for preparation prior to verification, increased guidance and resources for farmers, and improved feedback systems.**

- o The timeframes for A+ have been shifted so that farmers are now given at least 3 months' notice of upcoming verification.
- o Internal checklist assessments completed this year were significantly more thorough than in previous years, involving substantially more feedback for farmers.

- o "When comparing to the assessments of the previous year, it's clear that the commitment by AQNZ of a dedicated A+ programme coordinator has made a significant difference to the preparedness of the farms for the assessment, and therefore to the quality of the systems in place on farms." – 2023 Nautilus verification report.

"Growers showed high regard for the A+ programme and its importance to the wider industry, and the commitment to the integrity of the programme was clear to the assessor. It's clear that the programme is succeeding in its number one mandate: to improve the sustainability of the New Zealand Aquaculture industry across the board in a positive and collaborative manner."

*Nautilus Collaboration  
(2023 A+ Verification Assessment Report)*

**The verifier recommended that AQNZ continues collaboration with industry to develop and provide current resources and support for improving objective evidence of best practice.**

- o Numerous resource templates have been developed for farmers by AQNZ. These include wildlife management plans, biosecurity management plans, training registers, engagement registers, etc.
- o The A+ website has been updated to include a comprehensive resource library for farmers which will be updated with additional resources going forward: ([www.aplusaquaculture.nz/aplus-resource-library](http://www.aplusaquaculture.nz/aplus-resource-library)).

- o According to verifiers, in 2023 there were significant improvements in the programme and the quality of farmer evidence in the last year. They stated that a high standard of evidence provided by assessed farmers was observed.
- o "Many of the resources developed by AQNZ (such as the Biosecurity Management Plan template, or complaints register etc.) have been either implemented or are in the process of being implemented." – 2023 Nautilus verification report.



**Both the verifier and farmers have suggested minor improvements to the online portal and checklist.**

- o Feedback is gathered from both farmers and the verifier each year and improvement of the checklists is ongoing. Changes are made each year to improve question clarity, completion timeframes, information flow, data useability and relevance, and alignment with international best practice.

- o According to verifiers, the online checklist portal has seen marked improvement as a result of feedback.
- o "There were significant improvements in the protocol with changes made to several problematic questions identified in the previous year's report." – 2023 Nautilus verification report.

"Just a quick note to say that I've just used the Biosecurity Management Plan template that you prepared last year. Quite frankly I'd been putting off the preparation of that plan. But your template made it easy and time efficient. The risk controls look practical too. Well done and thanks."

*Email from Industry Member, 2023*

**Areas of objective evidence that were identified for improvement included formalised protocol and policy around wildlife interactions and shellfish health & welfare. AQNZ is encouraged to prioritise resources in this area.**

- o A Wildlife Management Plan (WMP) template has been developed and is currently available for farmers on the A+ website resource library.

**AQNZ has developed some great resources to support best practice objective evidence, however some farmers are unaware of the help available to them.**

- o Verifier encourages AQNZ to work on disseminating resources to farmers via workshops and other means over the coming year.





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

