

No trace of deadly prawn virus but more tests before Logan River gets all clear

It could be another year before Australia and Queensland are declared free of the deadly white spot prawn virus which plagued southeast Queensland in 2016. But a strict ban is still in place.

Judith Kerr, Quest Newspapers
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The Herbst Family dynasty who have the Marine Aquaculture Prawn Farm in Woongoolba on the Logan River. Noel Herbst with wife Liz, son Darrell and daughter Debbie.

It will be about a year before Australia and Queensland are declared free of the white spot virus which plagued southeast Queensland in 2016.

The latest tests of prawn and marine worm samples in and around the Logan River, where it was first detected, and in Moreton Bay all came up negative.

The negative results were from Biosecurity Queensland's second round of tests for the virus, which first broke out near prawn farms in the Logan River in December 2016.

Despite the negative results, the area must undergo further tests next year to get the all clear.

Additional biosecurity measures are still in place on the Logan River prawn farms where the disease was first detected.

Line fishing and taking of yabbies and marine worms is still banned around the prawn farm inlet and outlet channels on the Logan.

Fisheries Minister Mark Furner said if the next round of tests next year showed negative results, Queensland and Australia would be declared free of white spot disease.



Gold Coast Marine Aquaculture managing director and founder Noel Herbst, left, with Federal Leichhardt MP Warren Entsch and Queensland Fisheries Minister Mark Furner. PIC GIZELLE GHIDELLA

“But this means everyone must continue to remain vigilant to ensure the disease is contained and does not spread,” he said.

“I thank the industry for its resilience and patience during this hard time, and the general community, especially recreational fishers for heeding our messages and helping stop the spread of the disease.”

Three of the seven Logan River prawn farms shut down in 2017 moved back in to production and restocked ponds in summer.



Serena and Murray Zipf were the last of the seven prawn farms on the Logan River to find white spot disease. Here they inspect their chlorinated ponds in 2017. Photography David Kelly.

Although well down on production prior to the disease outbreak, output is set to double again this year with the biggest operator harvesting about 421 tonnes this season.

The news was welcomed by Logan River prawn farmers Noel and Debbie Herbst who pioneered prawn farming in Queensland when they establishing their family-run business in 1986.



Gold Coast Marine Aquaculture's Darrell, Debbie and Noel Herbst at the opening of their new prawn farm north of Port Douglas.

Their farm Gold Coast Marine Aquaculture went back into production last year and has already won the prestigious Champion Prawn and the Champion Aquaculture Product Trophy at the Sydney Royal Show.

Ms Herbst said the achievement was extra sweet. "Especially coming in our first year back in production," she said.

"Winning awards like that makes us feel proud of what we produce."

Australian Prawn Farmers Association president Matt West said the results boded well despite the seven Logan River businesses and the industry enduring financial and mental stress when they were forced to shut for more than a year to eradicate the disease.

"It's imperative we boost exotic disease testing regimes at our borders to prevent any other major disease outbreaks," he said.

"An end to the white spot disease outbreak would be very good result indeed, not only for the Logan farmers but Queensland's prawn farming industry, which is currently enjoying a considerable, statewide, expansionary phase."

The first reports of the outbreak in the Logan River emerged in December 2016 and in April 2017, the then State Fisheries Minister Bill Byrne blamed the then federal Agriculture Minister Barnaby Joyce for the spread of white spot.

Mr Byrne claimed the federal government failed to clamp down on the disease despite having damning information about its presence for a year.

In a scathing missive to Mr Joyce in July 2017, Mr Byrne said the federal government's failure to act cost the taxpayer \$17 million in the first seven months.

It also resulted in the prawn farmers and the industry receiving a compensation package for destocking their ponds.