

## Borderline battle with horse flu



"Sean" and other Department of Primary Industry officers will be joined today by security guards who have been stationed at bridges along the NSW border to stop illegal horse-related movement.

Photo: *Wayne Taylor*

### Latest related coverage

- [Saddling up's a bill not to be sneezed at](#)

AdvertisementAdvertisement

Chris Johnston  
September 8, 2007

HE'S sitting beside the road in his mud-splattered white car just over the Murray River in New South Wales. The bridge from Moama to Echuca stretches before him, crossing the divide. On the New South Wales side there is horse flu. In Victorian Echuca there is not. Which is why he's here, sitting, looking.

The car has a Department of Primary Industries sign on the door — "Animal Health". But apart from that, "Sean" is incognito, scanning the mirrors, staying alert with sports drinks, wearing sunglasses but no uniform to distinguish him. He has binoculars, a digital camera and a notebook ready and he has a hotline to the local police.

Sean is at the front line of the battle to keep the exotic disease equine influenza — horse flu — out of Victoria. The battle will be dramatically upgraded today when security guards join the 20 State Government department officers, like Sean, who have been stationed at bridges along the NSW border to stop illegal horse-related movement.

The virus, which was detected at Sydney's Eastern Creek quarantine station on August 24, has caused the cancellation of the NSW spring racing carnival. It may cost the industry more than \$100 million. The Federal Government has announced a special inquiry to be conducted by retired High Court judge Ian Callinan.

New South Wales and Queensland have been hit badly. Victoria, with a famed racing and thoroughbred breeding industry, and the looming Melbourne Cup, has so far escaped infection. But equine influenza is highly contagious. Even a blanket, saddle or horse float — or human — who has been near an infected horse can spread the disease.

Sean and his colleagues have to detect such movement, but they cannot enforce it. That's up to the police from local towns, who they telephone, giving vehicle registration numbers if they see floats, even empty ones, on the road. The police stop the vehicle and look in the float and ask to see permits, which are required to move horse equipment. If there's no permit, they're told how to get one (between 12pm and 2pm at border-town department offices). If it's after

2pm, they're told to go home and try again the next day. If there's trouble or noncompliance, the police can make arrests.

So far this has not happened. But it only takes one. Plenty of horse floats going through, but nothing illegal. Not yet. Meanwhile, Sean, who has been diverted from his usual job as a Mornington Peninsula fisheries officer, keeps his eyes open, and waits. As a fisheries officer he often investigates criminals illegally catching abalone, which is why he won't give his full name.

On the wide horse flu front line, it's less about detective work and more about stamina and patience. "If you miss a second you miss what you have been waiting all day to see," he said. But goodwill means the laws are mostly obeyed. "If anyone wants to run the gauntlet," he said, "ourselves and the police are ready to respond."

Still, it's a big border, stretching from Cape Howe to beyond Mildura. The department last night had officers at Mildura also covering Yelta and Wentworth, at Robinvale, at Swan Hill, Barham, Echuca, Tocumwal, Yarrawonga and Wodonga. There were also security measures at Mallacoota. Smaller towns with interstate bridges remained largely unprotected.

**THE STANDARD**

## Glimmer of hope on virus

SARAH SCOPELIANOS  
September 6, 2007

SCIENTISTS are closer to understanding the virus killing abalone stocks across the south-west as the disease continues to spread.

Researchers revealed they were closer to developing a test to detect and diagnose the herpes-like virus which has brought the multi-million-dollar industry to a standstill for almost two years.

The virus, known as ganglioneuritis, first infected wild abalone stocks near Port Fairy before spreading to Childers Cove in the east.

Fisheries Victoria has now revealed the disease had been confirmed in abalone south-west of Cape Bridgewater.

A statement from Fisheries Victoria executive director Peter Appleford said scientists from the Department of Primary Industries and the Australian Animal Health Laboratory were continuing to develop a polymerase chain reaction test.

He said a commercial abalone diver had reported abalone showing signs of the virus while diving at a reef located on the south-west corner of Cape Bridgewater on August 23.

Samples taken confirmed the presence of ganglioneuritis, which indicates the disease continues to spread.

## Seven arrested for alleged roles in abalone-poaching ring

By [Mark Gomez](#)  
[Mercury News](#)

Article Launched: 09/06/2007 01:11:38 PM PDT

A one-month undercover operation by the California Department of Fish and Game resulted in the arrests this morning of seven South Bay residents who allegedly took part in an abalone-poaching ring off the Sonoma County coast.

The group included buyers and sellers, according to Fish and Game Lt. Kathy Ponting, who said the divers illegally harvested hundreds of abalone and sold them on the black market.

Ponting, who oversees the special operations unit that conducted the investigation called "Hat Trick," said some of the individuals arrested had been cited previously for abalone violations. During the abalone season, divers are limited to three abalone per day, and no more than 24 during the season that runs from April-June and August-November. Ponting said her unit, which first began surveillance Oct. 1, has proof that divers each took more than 40 abalone in the past month.

"If you look at this case, how many years they've been diving, we're looking at thousands and thousands of abalone that this core group has harvested for monetary gain," said Ponting, who later added that "none of the divers appear to have any other sort of income."

Among those arrested were four men and two women from San Jose: Chien Van Tran, 47; Bot Van Ho, 50; To Tran, 56; Andy Van Le, 54; Oanh Thi Tran, 47; Cuu Thi Nguyen, 51. Van Le and Su-Jan Lin Chuang, 49, of Cupertino, are allegedly the buyers, Ponting said.

The group were booked into San Jose Main Jail and will

---

face charges in Sonoma County ranging from conspiracy to commit a crime (a felony), and unlawful commercialization of wildlife, harvest of abalone for commercial purpose (which carries a \$15,000 to \$40,000 fine), unlawful possession of abalone, over-limit of seasonal harvest, and failure to fill out an abalone card.

The divers are facing the most severe sentences, Ponting said, and could go to prison for three years.

The investigation began when the Department of Fish and Game received a call on its tip line. Once officials realized it was the same group that had been cited previously, they decided to dedicate their efforts to dismantling the illegal operation.

Harry Morse, a spokesman for Fish and Game, said the poachers were only going after large abalone, which can fetch between \$80 to \$100 each on the black market. Abalone is considered a delicacy and aphrodisiac, according to the state Department of Fish and Game, and is used for medicinal purposes.

The north coast of California has always been closed to the commercial take of abalone, according to Fish and Game, allowing only for limited method of harvesting, including rock-picking and free diving.

"The black market from California fish and wildlife annually is thought to be well over \$100 million, second only to the drug trade," Ponting said.



## WA growing closer to inland abalone

Thursday, 06 September 2007

[Curtin University](#)

Researchers at Curtin University of Technology's aquatic research laboratory have found that, once treated,

inland saline waters in Western Australia can be used to culture greenlip abalone.

The research revealed that while abalone could not survive in untreated and potassium-deficient inland saline water, once ions were manipulated in the inland water, the survival rate of greenlip abalone increased significantly.

Associate Professor Ravi Fotedar from Curtin's aquatic research unit said the research findings bring us one step closer to the use of inland salt water for aquaculture.

"Inland saline water aquaculture has been considered an alternative to traditional coastal marine aquaculture for sometime, however this research provides the industry with the technology and knowledge to capitalise on this opportunity," Associate Professor Fotedar explained.

The research found that when the level of potassium was increased to a minimum of 66 percent of that found in sea water, the survival of abalone in inland saline water was significantly increased.

"The findings certainly suggest that inland salt water aquaculture is a viable option, including abalone culture.

"With worldwide demand for the popular delicacy increasing at a rate that outweighs supply, the opportunity to expand abalone aquaculture industry using inland sources of water in WA is now feasible," Associate Professor Fotedar said.

The research was conducted by Associate Professor Ravi Fotedar, and Honours students Sean Savage and Simon Harris. The abalone used in the research were supplied by Bayside Abalone Hatchery.

Curtin researchers together with Bayside Abalone are also working on a project to crossbreed two species of abalone to create a commercially viable species for temperate waters to enable abalone aquaculture outside of the south-west coast of Australia.

The brownlip/greenlip hybrid is expected to grow 30% faster than the commercial greenlip species, increasing overall abalone production on farm.



## Divers attack deadly virus

A DEADLY virus infecting abalone in the western waters of Victoria now threatens Port Phillip and Western Port and could decimate the multimillion-dollar local industry.

Victorian Abalone Divers Association chief executive Vincent Gannon said the industry faced ruin unless the virus was contained.

Mr Gannon, formerly of Tyabb but now working out of Portland, said there were about 30 abalone divers working around peninsula waters and nothing was being done by government to monitor the situation.

Wilson's Promontory to Point Nepean produced two-thirds of the central region's abalone, or 400 tonnes annually, Mr Gannon said.

With the horse flu epidemic, government had shown it had the ability to move swiftly and it was better to err on the side of caution, he said. Instead, government was playing the blame game.

To help prevent the virus spreading, he said VADA had moved out of the infected area from Warrnambool to the 12 Apostles Marine Park and potentially \$2.8 million worth of export business.

The herpes-like virus, called ganglio-neuritis, was first detected at a Portland abalone farm early last year. The source is unknown, with possibilities including movement of resistant abalone into a native population, a



In deep: A deadly abalone virus is threatening local waters. Picture courtesy Blue Water Hunting

species jump, imported feed or abalone products, or a mutation of a previously non-pathogenic virus.

Mr Gannon said after filling three shopping bags, he gave up picking up dead abalone at Murrells Beach, near Portland on Thursday. Washed up shells showed the virus appeared to have been lethal to all age classes.

"This could mean many years for the area to recover, if ever."

VADA had issued divers with disease kits, established a reporting mechanism, and recommended washdown

procedures. VADA divers also have been advised to pick up samples of abalone that appear suspect.

Brad Warren, national chairman of OceanWatch Australia, commended the Victorian divers' initiative.

"These guys should be praised for the way they have handled themselves in the face of this crisis.

"I have read that Fisheries Victoria is blaming the Victorian divers for the spread of this virus.

"With a \$75 million dollar a year industry on its knees, I would suggest that Fisheries

Victoria should be using their resources to attempt to remedy the situation rather than trying to attach blame to a professional group that has been proactive in identifying the extent of the viral outbreak, as well as voluntarily doing something about it."

The disease testing kits were funded by VADA with assistance from OceanWatch Australia and Seafood Industry Victoria. Fisheries Victoria provided no financial assistance, Mr Warren said.

Mr Gannon said VADA asked Fisheries Victoria about its recent statements

blaming divers but had received no response.

In November last year, VADA approached OceanWatch for assistance in reviewing and updating its code of practice to include bio-security protocols for reducing the potential of divers to spread the disease.

Divers are required to completely wash down boats, diving gear and bilge with truck wash. They have to wash down between fishing areas and at the end of each day.

The estimated 80 Victorian commercial divers who are bearing the crippling financial cost of this mess, should be supported in this time of uncertainty, Mr Warren said. "Time and again, when those responsible for managing our marine resources are confronted by a tough issue, commercial fishers are used as the scapegoat. We should be getting behind our commercial fishers, not putting the boot in while they are down."

(OceanWatch Australia is a national environmental, not-for-profit company working to achieve sustainability in the Australian seafood industry through partnerships with industry, government, natural resource managers, business and the community.)

## Abalone industry waits in fear



Article from: The Sunday Tasmanian

GILL VOWLES

September 02, 2007 12:00am

**STANLEY abalone farmer Rod Crowther has \$5 million and five years' hard work invested in his business but all he can do to protect his livelihood is cross his fingers and hope.**

Mr Crowther, who is also a wild abalone harvester, has already suffered significant losses on his Western Victorian zone licence, where his quota has been cut from 17 tonnes to seven.

He believes that if the disease devastating the Victorian industry, viral ganglioneuritis, hits Tasmania he'll lose everything.

"If it comes it will wipe out my \$5 million investment and my 10 staff would be out of work," he said.

"Farms are more at risk because it is likely the virus will affect all of the fish, whereas in the wild only a percentage of the abalone are affected.

"We are doing everything that can be done but until we know more about the virus there is not a lot we can do except be vigilant and keep our fingers crossed."

Mr Crowther established his abalone farm -- one of six in Tasmania -- in 2002.

"I've been a wild diver since 1984 and I figured the next move was to do something to take the pressure off the wild resource," he said.

As farmed abalone take up to four years to grow to marketable size, Mr Crowther is only just starting to get some return on his huge investment.

"Last year was our first year of production and we are aiming to produce 70 tonnes or 600,000 abalone a year, primarily for the Chinese market."

Mr Crowther said he was pinning his hopes on the development of a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test to detect the virus now hitting abalone stocks.

"The virus DNA is currently being sequenced and when that is done scientists will be able to develop a PCR test which will allow us to test all healthy abalone to see if they are harbouring the virus.

"The test will also enable researchers to compare the Victorian virus to the viruses which decimated the industry in Taiwan and China.

"We are hoping the test will be available by February at the latest because at the moment we have more questions than answers."

Mr Crowther says he has procedures in place on his farm to deal with the virus if it is detected.

"We will be able to act quickly with little or no flow-on effect to the wild fishery," he said.

"Farmers have copped some criticism but it is in my interest, and every farmers' interest, to ensure the disease does not get a hold here because we have too much to lose.

"At the moment I think the biggest threat is the virus being carried on divers' gear and while commercial divers are following strict protocols we don't know how diligent the recreational industry is being."

"Ultimately I think that keeping Tasmanian abalone virus-free will depend on people doing the right thing."

## The Australian

### No horsing around

- Font Size: [Decrease](#) [Increase](#)
- Print Page: [Print](#)

*September 04, 2007*

#### **Stringent quarantine is vital to the Australian economy**

HORSE flu is an illness not to be sneezed at. So the appointment of recently retired High Court justice Ian Callinan QC to head an inquiry into the outbreak of equine influenza is a welcome development in what has been a bleak fortnight for the Australian racing and breeding industry, worth an estimated \$8 billion to the economy. While horse flu is rarely fatal, there are extensive economic consequences as racing and equestrian competitions, breeding, shows, sales and the export of horses and equine products grind to a halt because of movement restrictions and bans on products until the disease is contained.

The fact that the federal Government was warned by the racing industry that changes to quarantine procedures on imported horses would expose the country to the threat of equine influenza, as reported in yesterday's *The Australian*, raises a serious question for Minister for Agriculture Peter McGauran, who must explain why the Government failed to take the advice of the industry.

In these circumstances, an inquiry is all the more important, particularly one that will proceed with absolute independence. Mr Callinan is a highly suitable appointment. As a former chairman of the Queensland TAB, he will be acutely aware of the importance of identifying the breach in quarantine protocols that allowed the

illness to break out in Australia. He is also widely respected as a black-letter lawyer whose independence cannot be questioned. Anyone who suggests otherwise has only to look at his High Court decision on the Work Choices legislation when he voted against the federal Government and in favour of the state governments.

It is a dark day for Australia when its quarantine and biosecurity procedures are compromised. As an island continent, Australia has enjoyed protection from a wide range of exotic pests and diseases because of its natural barriers. But in the age of globalisation, the threat of infection and contamination is increasing exponentially. That equine influenza could enter the country is devastating enough for the racing industry. Other exotic diseases, such as foot-and-mouth, might wreak even more havoc on Australian agriculture.

With the Melbourne Cup approaching, Victorians are rightly concerned about the threat to their racing carnival, which might stop the rest of the nation from working but generates some \$629 million in economic activity in the state, delivering a net benefit of \$262 million. The Victorian Government is to be praised for the speedy action it took to preserve the state from infection. But in other areas, such as the abalone industry, it has not been as vigilant. Failure by the Victorian Government to take stringent measures is threatening Tasmania's \$100 million abalone industry, which provides 25 per cent of the world's annual harvest and has already devastated wild abalone stocks along 200kms of Victorian coast.

Given that the economic cost of horse flu is estimated to be at least \$220 million for the NSW betting industry and at least \$100 million for the thoroughbred breeding industry, the federal Government's emergency fund of \$4 million looks extremely modest. Nonetheless, principles of sound economic management must prevail in making assistance available, and it should be remembered that while racing has a high profile, others suffering economic hardship, such as fishermen, have not had access to assistance.

Without wishing to jump the gun on Mr Callinan's report, it is vital that Australia maintains the strongest practical quarantine procedures and takes a national approach to protect its vital economic interests from the threat of disease.



## **Abalone industry calls for Federal intervention on disease threat**

Posted Sun Sep 2, 2007 12:00pm AEST

Tasmania's abalone industry is joining forces with two other states to pressure the Federal Government to intervene and stop the spread of a virus that's been killing abalone in Victorian waters.

The industry has joined its South Australian and Victorian colleagues to lobby the Fisheries Minister, Senator Eric Abetz to introduce further biosecurity measures to fight the ganglioneuritis outbreak.

Dean Lisson from the Tasmanian Abalone Council says the Victorian Government has handled the issue badly, and more needs to be done to eradicate the virus which could threaten the local industry.

"We intend to request that the Commonwealth Government becomes involved in overseeing the management strategies for this virus and any potential future viral outbreaks," Mr Lisson said.



## A biosecurity wake-up: Growcom

September 03, 2007

Peak horticulture organisation Growcom says the horse flu outbreak is been a wake up call for Australia's biosecurity agencies.

Chief Advocate Mark Panitz says that for the first time Australians had felt the impact of a biosecurity issue which radically affected their lifestyle while also causing tremendous economic and social damage to Australia.

"How much more serious would an issue like this be for Australians if it affected our food supply?" Mr Panitz asks.

"The reality is that serious biosecurity issues have already affected horticulture. We have seen an outbreak of the disease citrus canker necessitating the destruction of vast areas of citrus orchards in Emerald and the disease black sigatoka devastating banana plantations in north Queensland.

"Clearly, the onus is on Australian quarantine agencies to halt the introduction of pests and diseases which could more generally affect Australia's food bowl. In light of the current horse flu epidemic, Australians should be questioning themselves as to whether enough is being done."

[Go Back](#)



Breaking Rural News : AGRIBUSINESS AND GENERAL

### Horse flu: Inquiry impact to reach far beyond racing

Tuesday, 4 September 2007

The sheep and cattle industries will be among the keenest readers of the findings of the horse flu biosecurity inquiry, as similar biosecurity procedures would apply in the case of an exotic disease outbreak in cattle or sheep.

Biosecurity procedures need to be constantly refined and updated, AgForce chief executive officer, Brett de Hayr, said today.

"These plans rely heavily on our government agencies and the current horse flu outbreak is a real test for Biosecurity Queensland, the government body formed only 12 months ago," he said.

"So the inquiry needs to look at the handling of this issue by both state and federal authorities, especially in the early stages."

The first 48 hours of any outbreak are critical and the review is of major importance to ensure the fastest response times possible, he said.

He said the impact of the equine influenza outbreak has stretched well beyond the racetracks, halting mustering and droving operations throughout rural areas in Queensland.

"Tens of thousands of stock horses across Queensland have been caught up in the standstill," Mr de Hayr said.

"In some cases this has meant that cattle and sheep producers have been unable to muster livestock for transport or to carry out routine operations such as shearing and weaning."

SOURCE: Breaking news from *Queensland County Life* weekly newspaper, updated daily on *FarmOnline*.

# Geelong Advertiser

## Sinking feeling: Pesky pipes to be fixed to seabed

Rainie Fraser

03Sep07

**THE reburial of pipes on the Indented Head foreshore is expected to begin this week after more than four years of lobbying by a local community group.**

Site supervisor Ray Tyshing, a marine manager at GHD who completed a report on the most efficient way of resinking the pipes, said the works had been delayed last month after tenders were submitted but Elstone Construction Services could this week begin improvement and reburial works.

Mr Tyshing's report, which was commissioned by Indented Head Aquaculture Farm operator Great Southern Waters, found August was the best time to secure the pipes to the sea floor as contractors could expect good weather and complementary tide conditions.

"The proposed method of doing the works is based on a study of various options and costs, the constructability and minimisation of risks and working through that process," Mr Tyshing said.

"It was then reviewed by an independent expert, a marine pipeline engineer . . . and then put to the Department of Sustainability and Environment and Parks Victoria. The method was then endorsed by the City of Greater Geelong."

Community members have been fighting to have the pipes reburied under the seabed for almost five years, and Indented Head Community Association spokesperson Anne Morell said the group was eager to see farm management commit to improving the popular beach for residents.

The five discharge and intake pipes are supposed to rest on the sea floor, according to City of Greater Geelong and Department of Sustainability guidelines, but consistently rise to the surface when sand coverage is washed away.



## Abetz says virus is Victorian responsibility

Posted Mon Sep 3, 2007 6:07am AEST

Updated Mon Sep 3, 2007 6:28am AEST

The Federal Fisheries Minister, Senator Eric Abetz, says a virus destroying abalone stocks in Victoria does not fall under his jurisdiction.

Tasmania's abalone industry has joined forces with its Victorian and South Australian counterparts to lobby the minister to introduce tougher biosecurity measures to fight the outbreak of the ganglioneuritis virus.

Senator Abetz says the outbreak originated in Victorian waters, making it a State issue.

He says if the virus spreads to Tasmanian waters he'll seek advice on how he can help the industry.

"The submission they'll be putting forward to me I'll look at with a very keen interest," Senaor Abetz said.

"Unfortunately it started in the Victorian coastal waters, it appears from a Victorian abalone farm, and as a result it was within the State jurisdiction."



## Shell shock

Article from: The Sunday Tasmanian

GILL VOWLES

September 02, 2007 12:00am



**FISHERMEN from three states have joined forces to urge the Federal Government to take control of an aquatic disease which could destroy Tasmania's \$100-million-a-year abalone industry.**

The action has been taken because of a decision by the Victorian Government to stop monitoring viral ganglioneuritis, a herpes-like virus first found in two Victorian abalone farms in December 2005.

The Tasmanian abalone industry has joined its Victorian and South Australian counterparts in asking the Federal Government to take responsibility for managing the disease. Spreading at the rate of 5-10km a month, the disease has affected 200km of coastline and cost the Victorian industry \$9 million in lost export income.

Abalone Council of Tasmania chief executive Dean Lisson said Tasmanian divers and producers believed the Victorian Government had been less than vigilant.

"We will shortly be asking federal Fisheries Minister Eric Abetz to manage the outbreak," Mr Lisson said.

He said if the disease, which kills up to 95 per cent of infected abalone within three days of infection, reached Tasmanian waters it could wipe out the state's industry.

The industry believed the two fish farms where the disease was initially found had to be urgently reviewed.

"Those two farms . . . are still pumping untreated effluent into Bass Strait," he said.

"That simply defies belief. We are extremely concerned the Victorian Government appears to be dragging its heels . . . managing the outbreak."

Tasmania has the largest wild abalone fishery in the world and provides about 25 per cent of the annual world harvest.

The State Government has introduced strict biosecurity measures to stop the disease from crossing Bass Strait.

These include a total ban on abalone imports and closing of the Bass Strait island fisheries.

In addition, an abalone possession exclusion area has been declared north of Flinders and King islands, new hygiene protocols have been introduced and from August 1 all abalone -- both recreational and commercial - caught in Tasmanian waters have to be landed in Tasmania.

However, the Victorian Abalone Divers Association says its government is doing nothing.

VADA chief executive Vin Gannon said brood stock were not being protected and there was still no active monitoring of the virus.

"Officials have done almost nothing since the original outbreak," he said.

"Four months ago they stopped actively monitoring its progress and they've all but stopped surveillance of poachers who have helped spread the disease."

"A spokeswoman for the Victorian Department of Primary Industries, Melanie Curtis, confirmed active surveillance of the disease had stopped because of its high cost and questionable benefits.

Ms Curtis said the department was continuing to work closely with abalone farmers to develop a formal abalone health surveillance program for farms and was engaging an external consultant to help develop a surveillance program for the wild sector.

"Mr Lisson said while Tasmanian divers and farmers were very concerned about the disease, they believed the State Government's response was adequate.

"He said the industry wanted a range of measures implemented immediately.

"The practice of hybridising should be immediately halted," he said.

"We also want an immediate ban on the import of Taiwanese feed and a full review of the biosecurity of all Australian abalone holding facilities -- not just farms.

"We are calling for complete effluent treatment, including complete pathogen removal, from all facilities which put effluent back into the wild. That has to happen Australia-wide and it has to happen as soon as possible."



## **Pair accused of abalone poaching**

Posted Tue Aug 28, 2007 3:44pm AEST

Updated Tue Aug 28, 2007 4:25pm AEST



Two people have been reported on abalone offences.

- [Map: Robe 5276](#)

Two men have been reported for allegedly taking nearly 200 abalone from waters near Robe in the south-east of South Australia.

Fisheries officers stopped the men last week and say they found 181 blacklip and three greenlip abalone, worth nearly \$3,000.

In SA, the bag limit is five abalone per diver per day.

The men, from Mawson Lakes and Salisbury Heights in Adelaide, are expected to appear in court later.

**Tags:** [law-crime-and-justice](#)



## Divers plead innocence over Govt allegations

Posted Thu Aug 23, 2007 2:04pm AEST

Abalone divers are surprised the Victorian Government says they are partly to blame for the spread of a deadly abalone virus on the south-west coastline.

The virus started at a commercial abalone farm near Portland, and has now spread east to Childers Cove and west to Cape Nelson.

The Victorian Abalone Divers Association's Vin Gannon, says commercial divers have a self-imposed quarantine area and are not diving among affected stocks.

"I'd made inquiries with the department in relation to that some months ago, I was told there was no indication of that," he said.

"So from our perspective, we've actually voluntarily not gone into the area between Warrnambool and the 12 Apostles Marine Park."

"Certainly the virus has moved about four months later ... but it certainly wasn't us because we weren't in the area. We haven't been there for about four or five months."



## Divers blamed for spreading abalone virus

Posted Tue Aug 21, 2007 5:34pm AEST

- [Map: Melbourne 3000](#)

Abalone divers have come under fire for being partly to blame for the spread of a deadly virus which has stripped the industry of tens of millions of dollars.

Diseased molluscs have been found along a two-hundred kilometre stretch of Victoria's coastline.

Reefs have been closed and farms stripped of stock.

And there is no sign the epidemic is under control.

The herpes-like virus, called ganglio-neuritis was first detected at a Portland abalone farm early last year.

Since then its wreaked havoc on Australia's \$75-million exotic and farmed abalone industry.

Dr. Peter Appleford, of Fisheries Australia says it is a nasty virus.

"It has a short infection time and a high mortality rate, so once the animals get it, they die," he said.

Hundreds of thousands of abalone farmed at sites where the virus has been detected were destroyed.

Breeders say the government was doing too little too late.

But today the authorities hit back, blaming divers.

Dr Appleford says divers must not dive in more than one place without thoroughly washing every single piece of their clothing and equipment, otherwise the deadly disease will continue to destroy the abalone industry.