

Sea Cucumbers Help Sex Life

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Sea cucumbers have become the “oyster” of the Chinese market with locals proclaiming the aphrodisiac qualities of the worm-like delicacy.

Regarded as the “sexy slugs of the sea”, sea cucumbers are being used in soups, stews and braised dishes in countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Japan, Korea and China to steam up kitchens and bedrooms alike!

The sausage-shaped echinoderms, which are found on the sea floor worldwide, are also said to offer excellent medicinal properties.

Despite commercial harvesting facilities in Western Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory, sea cucumbers are largely unknown in Australia, but that is steadily changing, according to producer Gilbert Hanson from Tasmanian Seafoods.

“Sea cucumbers are actually the oldest industry in Australia, with Indonesian fishermen, known as ‘Macassan trepangers’, catching and processing them on our beaches as Matthew Flinders circumnavigated the country in 1803,” claimed Mr Hanson.

“Huge supplies were taken back to South East Asia before the government taxed the Australian industry out of existence in the early 1800s.”

Mr Hanson said that sea cucumbers were commercially produced in Australia “on and off from the late 1800s through to the end of World War II” before the industry again became dormant. “But it started up again in the early 1990s and is now a multi-million dollar industry in Australia, and growing,” he said.

Varying dramatically in size, sea cucumbers – also commonly referred to as “hoi sam” (Cantonese), “trepang” (Indonesian), “gamat” (Malaysian) and “beche de mer” (French) – can be anywhere between 2cm and one metre in length, with about 1400 different species known, including sandfish, prickly redfish, white teatfish and long blackfish. Admittedly, only a dozen species are commercially viable.

“Sea cucumbers are recognised in China as one of the four ‘Kings of the Sea’ alongside abalone, shark fin and fish maws, and are highly valued for their aphrodisiac and medicinal properties,” said Mr Hanson.

The effectiveness of sea cucumber extract in tissue repair – which is said to not only heal a wound more quickly, but also reduce scarring – has become the subject of worldwide study, with the newly established Australian Seafood Cooperative Research Centre (CRC), launched in Adelaide today, set to develop the research even further.

“Through the CRC, we will be able to further research the perceived health benefits – and aphrodisiac properties – of sea cucumbers,” said Mr Hanson.

“It will also help us scientifically examine ways to successfully propagate sea cucumbers, which will benefit Australian producers.”

****PHOTO OPPORTUNITY****

Sea cucumber producer Gilbert Hanson will display a variety of species at today's launch of the Australian Seafood CRC.

Date: Monday, August 6, 2007.

Time: 1.00pm.

Where: Australian Fisheries Academy, Dockside, North Parade, Port Adelaide, South Australia.

For more information and to arrange an interview (and visuals), please contact: Gilbert Hanson Phone 0418 532 983 and Emily Downes (emily.downes@seafoodcrc.com) Phone 08 8201 7652

The Australian Seafood CRC is established and supported under the Australian Government's Cooperative Research Centres Programme. Other investors in the CRC are the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation, Seafood CRC company members, and supporting participants.