Humble sardines get a makeover thanks to new product development

BARRIER REEF BARRA TICKLES CONSUMER TASTES
Entering our Seventh Year – Future Possibilities

It seems unbelievable that the Seafood CRC has begun its seventh year of operation. Time has moved so quickly!

This was meant to be our last year of operation. However, we have applied to Canberra for a one–year extension, and although we have not had official approval of the extension in writing, all the signals received so far suggest it will be approved. Consequently we are planning to wind up in June 2015. (If it turns out the extension is not approved we will be arranging a crisis meeting of participants to look at the options).

The participant and government funds held by the Seafood CRC are 96% committed, but only 80% has been spent. The extension year is primarily designed to cover this gap by allowing projects to be completed in an orderly manner. In addition there are some participants that have significant funds they have yet to commit to projects. We will be working with those participants in the coming months to ensure the funds are used to good effect.

Looking to the future, many people will be aware that we tried to put together an application for funding for a rebid or new CRC. This application aimed to capitalise on the Commonwealth Government priority for new CRCs in manufacturing. It was a huge opportunity for seafood processors and the scientists working with that sector, but unfortunately we could not pull together the magic combination of industry opportunity, cash, technology and leadership in time. So the question remains – should we try again this year with an application that includes seafood processing and production research?

Also this year the same Commonwealth Government department that funds CRCs established a Food Innovation Precinct in Melbourne. The Seafood CRC became a founding member and we recently assisted some processors and industry associations to apply for the first round of funding made available to the precinct. We were unsuccessful, despite the hard work done by many people. However, we will stay engaged with the precinct to see how it evolves, as its mandate to work closely with industry partners is similar to the CRC.

During this year we will also continue to increase our efforts in extension of R&D results, particularly in the fishing and aquaculture sectors. Stay tuned!

Len Stephens
Managing Director
len.stephens@seafoodcrc.com
Measuring supply chain emissions

An exciting new project at the Centre of Excellence Science Seafood Health (CESSH) is underway to measure the carbon footprint of Australian seafood businesses. The PhD project, driven by increasing consumer interest in environmentally sustainable fishing, processing and retail practices, will analyse the potential savings businesses could make by decreasing carbon emissions.

Curtin University and Seafood CRC PhD student Felicity Denham has applied a life cycle assessment (LCA) tool to a finfish supply chain, encompassing the trawl, transport, processing and retail sectors. Results are divided into emissions associated with consumables, transport, energy and storage. Application of the LCA to this chain has identified the current carbon footprint and areas of greatest impact within the supply chain. It has found that total carbon counts are similar to international results, but carbon “hot spots” have been identified.

The next stage of the research is to identify strategies to reduce the environmental impact. These will be modelled to assess the impact on product quality and profitability, providing a holistic insight into potential improvements to current supply chains.

Post harvest research hub looks for new members

The Seafood Post Harvest Research Hub is an initiative of the Seafood CRC which brings together teams from SARDI, USC, Curtin University, UTas and QDAFF. The collaborative group meets regularly to present and discuss their seafood post harvest research, with the aim of developing joint research projects: a significant priority of the Seafood CRC.

The Hub meetings are held at different locations around Australia to gain a better understanding of the facilities available nationally and build interaction and industry linkages.

The CRC is now looking to grow and expand the hub to include more researchers involved in seafood post-harvest work – whether funded by the CRC or not.

There is also potential for facilitating international collaboration and engagement. This will provide opportunities for:
• Better collaboration between researchers;
• Improved research responses to industry needs;
• Further development of the researcher capabilities; and
• Coordinating communication and extension of results.

The next meeting of the Hub will be in September 2013 and will be hosted by the University of the Sunshine Coast, focussing on the activities of the USC Business School (marketing, supply chain, business clusters, strategy and impact). Contact Jayne Gallagher if you’d like to attend.
The humble sardine – once used for bait or pet food – is now making it onto the best restaurant tables in Australia, thanks to research undertaken by Curtin University with support from the Seafood CRC.

Cape Le Grande Australian Sardines is selling raw frozen sardine fillets and lemon flavoured panco crumbed frozen fillets to chefs in Western Australia and cafes in Sydney and Melbourne, and according to managing director Tim Rowe, the product is “taking off.”

But like all good new product development, it has required patient experimentation, quality assurance systems and an accurate understanding of the customer’s needs.

“My love for sardines began at our seafood processing factory in Geraldton where we processed our so called ‘prized’ species like West Australian Dhufish, Snapper and Groper,” Tim said. “We used to get pallets of frozen sardines as bait for the fishermen, and occasionally I would get the staff to fillet some of the sardines and cook them for lunch.

“They tasted great, and I just loved them. But I knew if you handled and processed them with the same care as we did with our expensive fish, they would taste even better. I kept on thinking one day I am going to value add these sardines and make them popular.”

In 2000, the company bought a sardine-fishing quota in the South Coast fishery, and along with another quota owner, launched Cape Le Grande Australian Sardines.

The next port of call was Dr Janet Howieson at the Curtin University’s Centre for Excellence for Seafood, Science and Health.

Janet helped Tim access Seafood CRC funds to investigate product handling and development, and worked closely with him on developing rigid supply chain protocols.

“Working together and with value-add through co-contribution between Cape Le Grande, Catalanos and Seafood CRC funds we spent more than a year refining the transportation and processing to ensure that every step of the pathway from boat to consumer was optimised for quality,” Tim said.

“The defining difference of the Cape Le Grande sardine is the taste, enhanced by their natural environment of very cold water.
“We have developed a great relationship with a small group of Western Australian professional fishermen who ensure a strict temperature control regime immediately after harvest, and during transportation to the factory for filleting and packaging.

“The supply chain is excellent – we are “target fishing” for the premium food service/retail market, which has been a shift in harvest practice for the fishery.”

Tim said the investment in the research process had been invaluable and gave him the confidence to invest in a processing machine from Sweden – the best in the world at filleting sardine – which is now installed at Catalano Seafood’s factory in Bassendean.

The raw frozen fillets are sold in 200g or 500g retail frozen trays and a 4kg carton (8 x 500g trays) while the crumbed fillets are sold in 5kg packs which provides portion control for restaurant kitchens.

But the supply chain doesn’t end at the wholesaler. “It’s very important to work with retailers or provide them with information to optimise their displays and maximise shelf-life,” Tim said.

“For example we’ve found that in-store cooking demonstrations at Catalanos retail stores have yielded amazing results, boosting average sales of 20 cartons to 90 cartons.”

Tim said he had also invested time in understanding the needs of the restaurant trade. The easy to cook crumbed product is very popular with cafes, whereas the raw fillets appeal to creative chefs in high-end restaurants.

“It’s good to have the variety of products but you need to ensure when restaurants want to re-order that distributors are well stocked – you can kill the fickle food market very quickly if you can’t supply.”

Curtin University surveyed chefs during the development phase, to understand their needs in regards to preferred forms, product weights and information they required on the new sardine product. This research informed the products produced and the supporting promotional material and strategies undertaken by Cape Le Grande during the launch phase. A subsequent follow up survey with chefs who had tried the sardines, found that chefs have responded positively to many of the launch initiatives established by the earlier surveys.

“There has been an excellent response to the convenient 500 gram portion packs which has enabled chefs to trial them without lots of wastage,” Tim said.

The crumbed fillets were also praised by chefs: “they work well in the deep fryer, have great flavour and texture and the crumb was nice and crunchy. I like the big fat, juicy fillets we get from Cape Le Grande,” the respondents said.

While there are a few challenges to go – mainly from consumers who are still coming to grips with the oilier, strong flavour, the small bones and the traditional perception of the canned variety – converting the opinion-making chefs has been a major first step.

“In places like Spain, Italy, Portugal, Greece and the Baltic countries, the sardine is a prince amongst a wide range of seafood and practically on every restaurant and tapas bar menu,” Tim said.

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"The market research showed us that Australians see Barramundi as their own iconic Australian fish and there is a powerful association with the clean waters of northern Queensland and the Northern Territory."

Understanding what the seafood consumer wants, has enabled GFB Fisheries to become one of the largest suppliers of fresh Barramundi in Australia in just seven years.

The company operates the Coral Coast saltwater hatchery and farm in Bowen in the Whitsundays and the GFB freshwater farm near Townsville, producing in total around 1000 tonnes of Barramundi a year for the domestic fresh fish market.

According to Director Ken Chapman, accessing the Seafood CRC’s Repositioning Farmed Barramundi Report early in the lifecycle of the business has played a big part in their success.

“We were fortunate to work with the Seafood CRC at a critical time when the business was moving from a production focus to a marketing and business development strategy,” Ken said.

“The market research showed us that Australians see Barramundi as their own iconic Australian fish and there is a powerful association with the clean waters of northern Queensland and the Northern Territory.”
“Consumers also understand that Barramundi is seen as a good source of Omega 3 and linked to a healthy lifestyle along with many other key nutrients as outlined in the CRC’s Super Seafood initiative.”

The first stage of the marketing strategy was to differentiate the product from our two farms.

“We talked to our wholesalers who told us that they already saw them as different products for different markets so we decided to embrace this differentiation,” Ken said. “Not only did this increase sales but it also gave us a better connection with the end user.”

“Our Coral Coast Barramundi is now marketed as premium fresh Whitsunday saltwater Barramundi particularly for restaurant and food service customers with a range of size options from plate size, mid size and larger fish. And our GFB farm now specialises in larger fillet size fish and for the large volume supermarket customers.

“We have been also actively involved in the Seafood CRC’s production research streams. Our Coral Coast hatchery undertook a world first mass spawning trial to underpin break through genetic improvement technology. And our GFB farm has been at the forefront of the off flavour research work of the CRC and as a result we have now adopted a clean water purging and salt finishing regime which completely eliminates any chance of off flavours,” Ken said.

“This means we can guarantee a great tasting superb quality fish every time right throughout the year which is exactly what the market is looking for.”

The second stage of the marketing strategy was to create a more aspirational brand, particularly for the Coral Coast product.

The company’s contemporary website uses strong imagery and evocative copywriting which communicates environmental sustainability, purity and Australian provenance, as well as promising market fresh delivery within 24 hours – GFB’s major selling proposition.

Ken said the branding has created a much better connection with distributors and wholesalers and there is now a valuable two-way relationship which assists the company with product development and quality assurance.

The next step is bringing branding into the retail sector and on to the restaurant table.

“I’m a big supporter of introducing country of origin labelling,” Ken said. “We know from the Seafood CRC research that consumers will buy Australian if given the choice, but they need to be given the right information to make that choice.

“Our goal is to see Coral Coast Saltwater Barramundi differentiated on restaurant menus in the same way that chicken, lamb and beef, with a particular regional provenance, are branded.”

Ken sees a big future for the farmed Barramundi sector, especially given the increasing pressure on wild catch seafood.

“Australian farmed Barramundi actually has only a tiny share of the total food market in Australia and as people start to embrace the health benefits of fresh fish and realise how quick and easy it is to cook a Barra fillet, then we think there are big opportunities to grow the industry.”

“We have already doubled our production in four years and are investing in research and development to underwrite future growth.”

Ken said the company’s next marketing initiative would be to introduce a range of value added products under the Perfection Seafood brand later this year.

Initially this will be a smoked Barramundi range, including fresh smoked fillets and vacuum packed whole smoked plate sized fish. Development is underway to extend the range and develop other new innovate value add products over time.

To find out the most up to date nutritional analysis of 20 species of Australian seafood visit Super Seafood at www.seafoodcrc.com.
SafeFish online

ALISON TURNBULL

Looking for technical food safety information about your products? If so help is at hand.

The Seafood CRC has launched a new website www.safefish.com.au to provide easy access to research reports and general information about seafood safety.

The CRC established SafeFish in 2009, together with SARDI and the former Seafood Services Australia, to provide technical support to Australia’s negotiation positions in CODEX.

Since it was established SafeFish has produced risk assessment reports for different product hazard combinations that have been used by the Australian government to open or reopen markets for Australian seafood.

Those same reports provide evidence for Australia’s seafood safety claims – a very important issue for our major export partner China. Those reports can now be accessed directly from the website.

Earlier this year the Seafood CRC farewelled the inaugural Chair of SafeFish, Dr Cath McLeod, who had the vision of how SafeFish could work. She worked tirelessly on behalf of our industry partners to ensure that decisions were based on sound science and where there were information gaps she created research teams to fill those gaps.

Dr McLeod created a solid foundation on which her successor Ms Alison Turnbull can build. The Seafood CRC welcomes Alison and we look forward to her taking the helm, and with her team and partner organisations, steering SafeFish to create a lasting legacy of the CRC.

The Seafood CRC has launched www.safefish.com.au to provide easy access to reports and information about seafood safety.
Label compliance countdown

ALEXANDRA McMANUS

January 2013 saw the enactment of new legislation for food labelling in Australia, bringing the subject back into the spotlight for all food businesses, including seafood. Seafood businesses may have thought that food labelling laws don’t apply to them – and you may hear yourself saying right now “but we only sell unpackaged whole fish and fillets!”

While fresh whole and filleted fish and seafood do not need formal food labels, retailers must be able to state the nutritional information of all unpackaged produce if requested. Similarly, they must provide kilojoule information for any take away food produced on the premises.

Health claims have enormous marketing potential, however they must be approved by FSANZ prior to them being placed on product labels. Those allowable in Australia are listed on the FSANZ website.

The Australian Seafood CRC has produced the Super Seafood package that can help with this requirement – you can download this kit from www.seafoodcrc.com

A key example for the seafood sector is labelling references to omega 3s. This is an important marketing point of difference, but the FSC requires that the nutritional information panel breaks down each type (DHA & EPA).

Food businesses have until January 2016 to comply with the revised Food Standards Code (FSC). The FSC governs the legal requirements for the composition, labelling, processing and safety of all foods sold in Australia.

The FSC is available on the Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) website (www.foodstandards.gov.au) and outlines some simple rules to follow. For example, food labels must be visible, clear, truthful, not misleading, show the nutritional composition of the food and state any possible allergens.

The Centre of Excellence Science Seafood & Health (CESSH) is available to assist businesses with information during this important transition period to January 18, 2016.

Retailers must be able to state the nutritional information of all unpackaged produce if requested by the customer (yes this means fresh, whole and filleted fish and seafood)!
The Seafood CRC is working with a number of its participants to improve their supply chains – it is one of the organisation’s core activities. We work both in the development of strategies and partnerships (as described in this article) as well as trialling technologies to assist with supply chain performance (traceability, Quality Index Schemes, refrigeration indexes, packaging). We have organisations in WA, Queensland, SA and Tasmania which have the research capacity to assist people with their supply chains. For more information contact members of the Seafood Post-Harvest Research Hub: Janet Howieson, CESSH (J.Howieson@curtin.edu.au), Mark Tamplin, UTas (Mark.Tamplin@utas.edu.au), Alison Turnbull, SARDI (alison.turnbull@sa.gov.au), Mike Clements, USC (mclements@usc.edu.au) and Sue Poole, QDAFF (Sue.Poole@daff.qld.gov.au).
Smart supply management sustains business

MIKE CLEMENTS

We talk a lot about product sustainability in the seafood industry – managing the resource and the environment so we have enough to catch and process and sell for the foreseeable future.

While having enough supply (caught or farmed product) to meet demand (from the processor or consumer) is certainly important, the way that product gets from the boat and farm to the consumer is just as important.

Achieving efficiency and adding value in that process so the end user gets the best possible experience, is the process of supply chain management. The motto of seafood supply chain management should be “run it as lean as you can and as long as you can, and be agile and responsive to the market from boat to plate.”

Fresh food supply chains all operate in a similar way. Whether you are producing mushrooms or mullet, bananas or Barramundi, often you are supplying a high volume – low margin product.

Using different chains (perhaps working with bigger wholesale and retail organisations) enables you to move beyond the high volume – low margin supply chain and enter more profitable niche markets.

Good supply chain strategy has multiple product offerings: some high volume – low margin for commodity type products, and some value-add niche products, which are low volume – high margin.

For example you may have a mix of vacuum packed, frozen and fresh product, a range of whole, fillets, plain or crumbed products.

In a global market it is harder to charge more for your product at the farm gate (or boat) and due to the intense competition in the rapidly consolidating retail environment, it is harder for the processor, distributor and fishmonger to increase their prices.

That’s where good supply chain management can add value and boost profitability, which is why we recommend that a supply chain strategy should be management driven from the CEO down- it’s part of a firm’s competitive business plan.

Supply managers, procurement people, logistics managers, marketing managers all have a supply chain role and if the strategy is driven by committed top-level management then its got support up and down the chain.

For example smart management strategy is influencing the much greater level of collaboration between organisations and the sharing of supply chains, which would have once been thought impossible.

By focussing on their core business, and outsourcing what is not their core business, these collaborative relationships can make businesses more efficient and profitable.

Good management will also see the need for a balance between efficiency and value adding, and this is where there are opportunities to leverage off other supply chain members.

Good supply chain management is about trust, the reliability to depend on other chain members to deliver on expectations, not just contractual supply agreements. People actively using all their market knowledge together – sharing and communicating – will together achieve better business outcomes than they could have individually. It’s about leveraging from each other’s strengths.

The other challenge for the seafood supply chain is to find new ways to create speed to market. If you can shorten the time to market you can reduce a lot of cost, but to do that you need to understand customer demand more precisely – there is no point getting the product there promptly to just see it deteriorate on the shelf.

The use of new technologies such as radio frequency ID tags (RFID) are increasingly being used to track and trace product along the length of the supply chain from manufacturer to customer, and there needs to be greater investment by the industry in market intelligence and customer buying behaviours.

Supply chain management must also be more closely connected to a company’s marketing strategy. Identifying the needs from the customer and working back to redesign the supply chain so that it is 100% customer focussed and market driven, will produce the most value- add for the customer, and the most return for the supplier.

Supply chains are often thought of as a cost. But if they are linked to strategy, they provide efficiency, growth, cost savings and improved profitability.

Professor Mike Clements is Head of the Business School at University of the Sunshine Coast and has been a participant in the Seafood CRC since January this year.
An integrated marketing campaign by Tassal has been credited with a dramatic increase in sales of Tasmanian Atlantic Salmon in Australia.

Tassal developed a multipronged, integrated approach to building a national awareness of the benefits of bringing salmon to the kitchen table.

This followed market research in 2012 which revealed a lack of consumer awareness about salmon’s versatility.

Positioning salmon as locally and sustainably produced, fresh and value for money, Tassal targeted its advertising and promotional campaign at 25 to 49 year old females.

The campaign had four main elements:
- Bring salmon to top of mind when planning meals and grocery shopping;
- Communicate salmon versatility in different meal types and occasions;
- Communicate a range of recipes to increase the recipe repertoire;
- Build Tassal brand awareness and purchase intention.

“Our $4 million investment delivered an integrated marketing plan which included TV, print and online advertising as well as public relations, social media, and in-store POS and promotions,” Tassal Senior Manager – Marketing Caroline Hounsell said.

“Our brand awareness increased by 140 per cent, within six months of our campaign launch.

“There were also significant increases in consumer attitudes towards salmon being value for money and a varied meal option for the whole family.”

As a result of the campaign there was a shift in the purchasing habits of consumers – most notably there was 32 per cent increase of respondents buying salmon on a weekly basis.

Sales across all Tassal salmon products jumped – fresh, frozen, canned and smoked – by between 21 per cent (fresh) to 66 per cent (frozen).

“This campaign has resulted in a sustainable shift in our business with more Australians than ever before eating Tassal salmon for breakfast, lunch and dinner,” Caroline said.

The Seafood CRC supported the Tasmanian producer by evaluating the effectiveness of the campaign.
Dr Meredith Lawley, University of the Sunshine Coast.
E: mlawley1@usc.edu

Including Australian seafood training material into the educational curriculum for apprentice chefs and commercial cookery graduates, is expected to develop a new generation of seafood friendly chefs.

The new project from the Australian Seafood CRC and Perth’s West Coast Institute of Training (WCIT) is set to create a much greater awareness among this critical target audience.

The CRC’s consumer research has found that 35% of all seafood is consumed out of the home, highlighting the need for chefs to understand and cook confidently with Australian seafood.

The course will cover information on production, harvest, supply chain processes, quality parameters, handling, processing and nutrition.

The project will have a focus on Seafood CRC participant species including wild and farmed prawns, rocklobster, Yellowtail Kingfish, Barramundi, Atlantic Salmon, sardines, abalone and oysters.

The project will focus on video based, on-line training content to be trialled at the WCIT at the end of 2013, before being rolled out to other registered training organisations.

If your company has video footage that could be utilised in this training package, we would like to hear from you.

For more information: Dr Janet Howieson (j.howieson@curtin.edu.au) or Emily Mantilla (Emily.mantilla@seafoodcrc.com).

A new accredited food marketing course – with special units on seafood – is planned to be launched at the University of the Sunshine Coast in 2015.

While the course aims to address the whole food marketing sector, including meat, dairy and horticulture, seafood participants will boost their understanding of the best practices, strategies and tactics which may be applied to seafood marketing.

Course topics include:
• The key issues facing the food industry globally
• Food industry operation – from production to consumption
• Basic marketing strategies for food products
• Seafood sector marketing expertise
• Strategies and tactics used by other food industries relevant to seafood marketing

The course will be offered as both a university accredited version (12 units) and an open access version which can be completed on-line assisting industry who work full time with further education.
Follow the marketing rules

BYRON SHARP

You don’t have to have a marketing degree to improve the sales of your seafood product – you just need to know the rules. That’s the message from Professor Byron Sharp who spoke at the Seafood CRC’s Marketing Cram Conference in May.

His seven rules of marketing are a feature of his new book “How Brands Grow”, which challenges much of the accepted wisdom about branding and advertising.

RULE 1: REACH OUT

Don’t believe the old 80:20 adage that 20% of your customers buy 80% of your product. In fact only about 50% of sales comes from your most loyal 20% of customers, so communicating with light buyers or even “non-buyers” is still important. Brands must reach out to every potential buyer by establishing good physical distribution and investing in cost effective marketing communications (advertising, PR, social media) that will reach as many people as possible for the smallest per capita cost.

RULE 2: BE EASY TO BUY

Undertake research to understand how consumers buy and how they fit your brand into their lives. Convenience is certainly a purchase driver – the convenience of being able to buy easily in a certain location (such as a suburban supermarket rather than a central metropolitan fish monger) or the convenience of the product (pre-packaged meals or portion pricing). But what is convenient for one person may not be for another...so do your homework.

RULE 3: GET NOTICED

Great distribution and saturation advertising amounts to nothing, if your ad is not noticed. Consumers are well trained to avoid advertising interrupting their lives and pay little attention to it. Despite this most consumers do process, remember and recall advertising and marketing messages subconsciously – and the most effective are those ads that we like.

Ads that entertain, make us laugh, draw on our empathy or trigger positive feelings will lead to better recall at the supermarket shelf. Clever, likeable creativity is the way to get noticed.

RULE 4: REFRESH AND BUILD MEMORY

Some times campaigns can be so creative that they are liked, even loved...but don’t actually convert to sales. This is because they don’t build a memory in the consumer about the critical propositions: what the brand does, what it looks like, what the brand name is, where it is sold and where and when it is consumed. Coke continues to remind us after all these years, that it a refreshing drink to enjoy when you are hot...and iPods give you a thousands songs at your fingertips.
**RULE 5: CREATE BRAND ASSETS**

Without a recognisable and distinctive brand, consumers have nothing to be loyal to (they will resort to price or whatever is on special). Branding also reminds them which product or company, advertising belongs to – M&M characters, the Nike Swish, the Mercedes three pointed star are “memory joggers”. Consumers don’t pause to think about a brand name or logo as much as advertising agencies think they do – that McDonalds is a Scottish name or what BMW stands for. Brands simply make sure you are noticed.

**RULE 6: BE CONSISTENT YET FRESH**

Brands outlast their creators, their managers and even the companies who started them if they are communicated consistently. Consumers are actually resistant to new ideas and are very happy to be reminded of things they already believe, particularly if it is done in an entertaining way. The art of good marketing is to tell the same story over and over and over but in new and entertaining ways. For that reason beware of packaging changes which can cause sudden and dramatic drops in sales.

**RULE 7: STAY COMPETITIVE**

In the competitive world of getting your product chosen over thousands of others, it is often more important to remind consumers why they should not buy another product than it is to buy yours. For example putting a premium on price (which is often discounted later) is a good reason for consumers not to buy. A competitively priced product doesn’t mean cheap, but also doesn’t mean it will be devalued by being given away. Marketing can be wasted if reasons not to buy such as fat and sugar content, safety or lack of availability dominate.

Professor Byron Sharp is the Director of the Ehrenberg-Bass Institute for Marketing Science at the University of South Australia, a participant of the Seafood CRC.

The Seafood CRC has 10 copies of “How Brands Grow” to giveaway to readers. Email Emily Mantilla and in one sentence describe why you like the SeaFOOD Magazine and how it improves your business. E: emily.mantilla@seafoodcrc.com
The Australian Seafood CRC was established and supported under the Australian Cooperative Research Centre Programme. The Seafood CRC receives funding from the Australian Government’s CRC Programme, the Fisheries R&D Corporation and other CRC Participants.

When we started the CRC many of the commonly held beliefs about consumer behaviour were just that – beliefs with little if any research validating them. Many innovations in seafood were based on trial and error.

The fact that we have come a long way in six years was evident in May, when experts and practitioners from Australia’s marketing sector came together for the CRC’s marketing CRAM conference.

Reports were short and sharp, questions were left to the networking breaks, there was much vigorous debate and discussion and some even experimented with the world of social media – and I have now become a Twitter addict!

If you weren’t able to make it to the conference here are some of the highlights:

Tassal’s Marketing Manager Caroline Hounsell kicked off the conference presenting early results from CRC funded research which is evaluating the impact of their TV advertising. See page 10 for more info.

Oysters Australia is working with the CRC to trial and evaluate a new approach to retailing and merchandising oysters. Executive Officer of the SA Oyster Growers Association Trudy McGowan reported that the early results were very encouraging – increased staff and customer awareness of the product attributes appears to have significantly increased sales. The key to the program is building strong supply chain relationships and ensuring staff are actively involved.

Associate Professor, Meredith Lawley, from the University of Sunshine Coast reported on CRC research she has undertaken with Dr Janet Howieson from the Centre of Excellence in Seafood Science and Health. They have conducted interviews with chefs to discover what they are looking for in seafood products. The research showed that chefs are time poor and are seeking convenience so wholesalers play a pivotal role as gate keepers and the order takers. Building good relationships with the wholesalers is the key to improving the information flow from producer to chef.

Reg Bryson from Brand Council reported on the development of the National Prawn Marketing Strategy, a process that has involved focused consumer research to better understand how to position Australian prawns in the domestic market. The research identified that prawns hold a special place in Australian diets and that people did not want to make them an “everyday” protein as this would take their “specialness” away. Knowing this has helped to develop the strategy which aims to “redefine celebration”.

The Australian Wild Abalone (AWA) China program was profiled by the Chairman of Abalone Council Australia, Dean Lisson. Working with the CRC the abalone industry has undertaken research to identify opportunities for differentiating their product in China. Facing increasing competition and driven by declining returns the industry is focused on the opportunities presented by the economic, political and social changes in China. The AWA program is based on safety, sustainability and provenance attributes of the product and, registering the trademark, using fraud prevention technology and building relationships with key Chinese industry and government are key elements of the program to be rolled out over the next 12 months.

We also heard from experts including Prof Alex McManus who explained food labelling laws and requirements; Dr David McKinna who provided advice on effective retailing strategies; Peter Fuller who presented on developing and using online, digital and social media to assist business growth.

For us at the CRC it is important that the research we do gets used by our industry – research that sits on a shelf is no good to anybody! So if you missed out on attending the CRAM – and want to find out more please do not hesitate to contact me.

MORE INFORMATION
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