Seafood shines at Australia Week in China

YOUR GUIDE TO SAFE PACKAGED SEAFOOD, FREE WITH THIS EDITION!
Predictive tools for prawn supply chains

MARK TAMPLIN, UTAS

A new tool has been developed to assist in predicting and managing supply chain performance. Well-designed supply chains ensure customers enjoy the highest quality seafood, especially products such as Australian prawns, which may travel long distances to market.

The tool developed by researchers at Curtin University and the University of Tasmania is part of a study which analysed Australian wild caught prawn supply chains, from harvest to retail, and identified best practices that maintain product quality.

The report is from the Australian Seafood CRC project Time-Temperature Management to Maximise Returns through the Prawn Supply Chain and will be available soon at seafoodcrc.com.au.

Quality assessment app

SUE POOLE, DAFF

The Seafood CRC is funding the development of a mobile phone app which can help you measure seafood quality. The app is being developed by the Seafood Research team at DAFF Queensland in partnership with the Sydney Fish Market.

The app incorporates the Quality Index (QI) method of freshness assessment, which measures changes in quality parameters of fish over storage time in ice. The app will include specific images for each parameter change to assist with accurate, objective measurement.

The app, which will mean that seafood quality can be measured at sea, on the wharf, in the processing environment or at retail level, is expected to be trialled at De Costi Seafoods, MG Kailis, and Sydney Fish Market prior to the December trade rush.
As the CRC moves into its final year of operation I have been reflecting on our achievements over the last seven years: some of my “favourite things” that have the potential to make big changes in the way we will continue to operate as an industry in the future.

PLUM EXTRACT
Kakadu Plums are little green fruits that do not look dissimilar to small lemons. They grow wild in Northern Australia and have been a traditional source of bush tucker and an antiseptic healing remedy for the Aboriginal people across Arnhem Land for thousands of years. Today Kakadu Plums are harvested commercially by the indigenous community.

A team of expert researchers at the Queensland Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry worked with the Seafood CRC and the Australian Prawn Farmers Association to develop a Kakadu Plum extract that has been scientifically shown to extend the shelf life of cooked prawns as well as maintaining their natural red colour during storage. This amazing result is due to the superb antioxidant and antibacterial compounds found in the fruit extract. Even better news is that Kakadu Plum is an approved natural food ingredient.

The new extract product is applied during the normal chilling and glazing process as prawns are packaged for transport to market. The effectiveness of the product in maintaining the freshness of chilled prawns was tested in a commercial trial involving 110 tonnes of farmed prawns. Feedback from the commercial operators has been very positive. The product was found to be easy to use, did not produce any flavour or odour changes and when the prawns had to be frozen, the extract prevented the loss of red colour that sometimes occurs in freezing.

This is a pretty special achievement by the Seafood CRC, with real commercial potential. As a result, a major opportunity exists now for food manufacturing companies to take Kakadu Plum extract to the next level as well as any enterprising seafood processor to be the first to market prawns that can claim to be the freshest in Australia.

If you are interested in commercialising the new product contact me at len.stephens@seafoodcrc.com or 08 8201 7650.

SAFER FISH
Another big achievement of the CRC I have been reflecting on lately has been the SafeFish initiative.

We will all remember the recent sad deaths from scombroid fish poisoning of a Queensland mother and daughter who ate seafood while holidaying in Bali. While such incidents are extremely rare, it does highlight the importance of understanding and managing seafood safety risks.

SafeFish is a technical group at SARDI governed by a committee of experts from industry and government, that conducts research, development and education to protect market access for the domestic and export seafood sectors.

It operates by bringing together experts in food safety and hygiene to work with industry and regulators to resolve technical issues impacting on trade, ensuring continued growth and development of the Australian seafood industry.

Since starting in 2010, SafeFish has delivered impressive results in the international trade arena by providing technical expertise to Australian delegations attending Codex Alimentarius meetings, developing harmonised international food standards.

As a result of SafeFish’s efforts, Codex has accepted many Australian proposals to modify international standards. For example, there will be significant savings to the Australian seafood industry as a result of Codex accepting risk-based marine biotoxin standards for abalone rather than mandating across-the-board biotoxin testing.

In addition Codex has accepted a ‘performance criteria’ approach for marine biotoxin methods which will allow Australia to undertake testing using a choice of validated methods rather than one pre-determined method.

Another positive outcome has been acceptance by Codex that *Vibrio* and virus testing should not be mandated across the board for shellfish, and SafeFish is also developing new testing capabilities for Norovirus and Hepatitis A in shellfish in Australia.

Businesses can get involved with SafeFish activities and gain access to its resources by contacting the Executive Officer Natalie Dowsett at natalie.dowsett@sa.gov.au or jumping online at safefish.com.au

For more information about Seafood CRC products you can use in your business now, visit seafoodcrc.com.
Seafood shines at Australia Week in China

JAYNE GALLAGHER

The Australian seafood industry enjoyed significant representation at this year’s Australia Week in China (AWIC). Touted as Austrade’s biggest trade mission ever to leave Australia, the promotion consisted of 105 events held across the cities of Shanghai, Beijing, Chengdu and Guangzhou, attended by 2,400 Chinese guests with an Australian delegation of over 700.

Working closely with Austrade, the Seafood CRC ensured that Australian seafood (Abalone, Rocklobster and Oysters) featured at many of the food and beverage events, helping to raise the sector’s profile with Chinese importers, customers and government officials, as well as Australian government officials and media.

AUSTRALIAN WILD ABALONE™ LAUNCH

The AWIC promotion was the perfect platform for the Australian Seafood CRC to launch its Australian Wild Abalone™ supply chain education program.

The program, which will help exporters secure their place in the Chinese market by strengthening Australia’s reputation as a supplier of premium wild caught abalone, was introduced to 150 VIP guests at the Shangri-La Hotel Pudong in Shanghai during AWIC.

The launch marked a Memorandum of Understanding signed between the Australian Seafood CRC, Abalone Council Australia Ltd and China Cuisine Association, which will help Australian exporters promote their products to top Chinese chefs and restaurants.

Top Executive Sous Chefs Pasquo King and Steven Zheng delivered an exquisite example of Australian and Chinese fusion with a menu developed especially for the Australian Wild Abalone™ event. The menu featured a deliciously refreshing Australian wild abalone warm salad a la tépányaki, thinly sliced abalone sautéed and dressed with Thai Nam Jim dressing and placed on top of fresh seasonal vegetables, green papaya, green mango, grated macadamia and lime.

PREMIUM AUSTRALIA DINNER

The Seafood CRC and product sponsors ensured that Australian Wild Abalone™, Pacific Oysters and Southern Rocklobster were not only a huge hit at the Abalone event, but were showcased on the menus of other AWIC events, including the Premium Australia Dinner.

The dinner was held on the final night of AWIC at the Peninsula Hotel and showcased some of Australia’s best food and wine.

The menu of the dinner, hosted by the Minister of Trade and Investment for 250 guests, included four dishes featuring Australian seafood developed by Executive Chef Terrance Crandall and paired with Australian wines by wine judge Jeremy Oliver.

In fact guests were overheard saying “that was the best Abalone I have ever tasted”.

COLLABORATION PAYS OFF

AWIC demonstrated to all of those who attended that to have an impact in the vast Chinese market we need to work collaboratively. Getting Australian Wild Abalone™, Oysters and Southern Rocklobster exporters all working together to showcase Australian seafood was a major coup, which we hope to repeat in the future.

But it is even more powerful to partner with other Australian exporters – Wine Australia, Tourism Australia, Meat and Livestock Australia as well as the financial services sector.

Continuing to pursue these partnerships will be a priority for the Seafood CRC Ltd over the next 12 months as we bring exporters together to work in our key markets.

Signing the memorandum of understanding, L-R: Jayne Gallagher, Manager Product and Market Development, Australian Seafood CRC; Mr Bian Jiang, Deputy Secretary General, China Cuisine Association; The Hon Bruce Billson, Australian Federal Minister for Small Business; Dean Lissich, Executive Chair, Abalone Council Australia Ltd; Dr Len Stephens, Managing Director, Australian Seafood CRC.
Showcasing all Australia has to offer makes a much bigger splash than every different sector organising its own small event. China is a huge market and it is very competitive so we need to be consistent and persistent with our efforts – we need to work as Team Australia.

**EXPORT CASE STUDY:** Tell the whole food story

JAMES CALVERT, Managing Director, Tas Prime Oysters

**Why did you attend AWIC?**
We have been exporting to China but only in small amounts. This was an opportunity to develop our markets.

**What are your current business dealings with China?**
We have been exporting high quality oysters to China in small volumes (less than 20 tonnes a year) at a high price for about three to four years. We’d like to increase our exports to about 100 tonnes a year.

**Top three lessons learnt from the trip?**
1. They want to know the whole food story – how it is made, where it’s from and how it got there.
2. Consumers are much more sophisticated than they used to be. The level of demand for high quality product is overwhelming.
3. They are no longer prepared to accept poor quality food at a low price. They are demanding good quality and happy to pay a premium for it.

**Number one highlight of the trip?**
Being able to talk directly with the major buyers - those who attended our stream of the conference (Food & Beverage) were extremely good businesses and we got a lot of value out of meeting with them face to face.

**Most surprising thing learnt about the seafood market in China?**
Demand for a high quality product. The Chinese are no longer prepared to receive oysters of average quality, which presents some production challenges for our industry. Where we could previously export 400,000 tonnes of average quality product, we have had to pull that back to 100,000 tonnes of high quality product because we can’t produce the volumes yet.

**What are the opportunities for your business in China and why?**
Our orders doubled the week we returned and the enquiries are five times that. The buyers would have taken our whole annual production if we could deliver the quality.

**Will you change anything about how you do business with China following the trip? Why?**
We will improve our operational processes to grow a higher quality product and improve our marketing by working closely with the Chinese buyers. They have offered to help us with our labeling and packaging to ensure it meets consumer needs.

Chef Pasque cooking at the Australian Wild Abalone™ Launch.
Why did you attend AWIC?
Our business has a defined customer base in China and I travel there frequently, but this was an excellent opportunity to interact with other Australian food producers.

What are your current business dealings with China?
The Craig Mostyn Group has been exporting premium Australian seafood to China for more than 20 years.

Top three lessons learnt from the trip?
1. Have a market entry strategy that is regionalised, and don’t treat China as one market.
2. Food security remains paramount. There is a lot of distrust in the Chinese market about the safety of food products, particularly from domestic producers.
3. Take more business cards. And make sure you have enough on you for important events.

Number one highlight of the trip?
The premium wine and seafood event held at the Peninsula Hotel, Shanghai.

Most surprising thing learnt about the seafood market in China?
Consumers are becoming busier with work and careers – I noticed more frozen and ready to eat meals available in retail outlets.

What are the opportunities for your business in China and why?
Economic growth in so called Tier 2 cities (eg. Chongqing and Chengdu) is developing rapidly. Given the supply constraints under quota-managed fisheries, demand will continue to outstrip supply.

Will you change anything about how you do business with China following the trip? Why?
I certainly see the value in collaborating with other Australian sectors. Wine and food is logical and given the cultural significance around seafood, I hope we can find innovative ways to partner together.

EXPORT CASE STUDY: Regionalise your market strategy

NATHAN MAXWELL-McGINN, Marketing Manager – CM Foods Division, Craig Mostyn Group

Growing the Chinese market

JAYNE GALLAGHER AND SAM GUTHRIE

The Seafood Trade Advisory Group (STAG) was formed in 2013 to enable a unified voice to communicate the interests of Australian Wild Abalone™ and Southern Rocklobster exporters, as momentum returned to crucial Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations between Australia and China.

The STAG membership is engaging with senior government and departmental officials to elevate the importance of the sector and ensure that any FTA between Australia and China includes a significant outcome for the Abalone and Southern Rocklobster industries.

The STAG has positioned itself as a partner to government providing regular briefings on the industry’s market development activities in China as well as reporting on issues of concern such as delays associated with customs clearance.

The STAG’s operatives in Beijing are engaged with key Chinese regulators and have built strategic relationships with seafood industry bodies supportive of increasing imports from Australia. These relationships are being used to progress access for individual line items, including canned Abalone, currently excluded from direct export to the mainland.

The STAG is now encouraging membership from the wider seafood industry, with a view to expanding the partnership in communicating with the Australian Government as well as with relevant regulators and industry in China.
Canapés at Australian Wild Abalone™ Launch.
A lack of exposure to seafood selection and preparation during their training means many Australian chefs lack confidence working with ocean produce, and many front of house staff are also uncomfortable when answering questions from patrons about seafood provenance and taste.

The Seafood CRC is hoping to turn this major challenge to restaurant sales around in the next few years, through a specially designed online video-based training program. The program stems from research interviews with up to 60 chefs across Australia, where chefs expressed a desire for greater knowledge of seafood supply chains and strategies to increase confidence in handling and preparing seafood.

This finding was further backed up at the Seafood CRC post-graduate student training camp in 2012, where chefs expressed their need for more seafood information and resources.

In their four years of training to become chefs, most apprentices will spend only four days learning how to select, handle and prepare seafood. On the job training can also be limited due to the hectic schedules of senior restaurant staff.

This is an interesting challenge for trainee chefs when one considers that they are expected to master the skills and techniques for cooking over 50 different species ranging from crustaceans, flat fish, oily fish to shellfish – unlike lamb, chicken, beef or pork which are all single species of animal.

In response to the research findings, a series of online video-based training resources have been created about different seafood types to help increase knowledge in commercial cookery and apprentice chef training courses.

Six popular Australian species used in restaurants and catering are featured in the training resources: rock lobsters, oysters, farmed Barramundi, Snapper, sardines and prawns – all from harvest to restaurant door.

The training resources also have a secondary target audience – front of house waiting staff who often have to explain menu choices with diners. The training will mean they can outline confidently where the fish came from and more accurately describe its texture and flavours.

Dr Janet Howieson, from Curtin University, WA who was the project leader of the training resource development project, said the package covers topics such as processing and supply, how the seafood gets to the restaurant door, the recommended procedure for receiving and checking the condition of the seafood and of course, cooking techniques.

The training resources all link directly to existing commercial cookery courses and qualifications and assessment procedures have been developed to accompany them.

To ensure industry relevance, leading chefs and seafood experts were involved in the project including Pete Manifis (Inconto Restaurant), Josh Catalano (Catalano Seafood and from Master Chef fame) and Don Hancey.

All three chefs feature in the training resources, which have already been piloted by apprentice chefs and commercial cookery students at the West Coast Institute of Training. The online video training resources will now be made available to the wider training community on a national basis.

Besides training, the resources will also make ideal TV screen consumer education retailer displays and can be used for new retail staff induction.

Primary and secondary schools can also use the resources and it is expected they will even appeal to the home cook and high interest “foodie”.

The training resources were officially launched as part of the training curriculum on May 12 at the West Coast Institute of Training.

The training resources can be viewed via Fishfiles fishfiles.com.au or downloaded via the Fishfiles vimeo page: vimeo.com/channels/fishfiles.

L-R: 1. Apprentice chefs and West Coast Institute of Training students prepare a seafood feast at the launch. 2. WCIT Lecturer Jason Smith with WCIT apprentice chef student. 3. Project team (L to R) — Jason Smith (WCIT), Don Hancey (WA Seafood Ambassador), Dr Janet Howieson (Curtin University), Josh Catalano (Catalano Seafoods), Rachelle Etienne-Breidenbach (FRDC), Emily Mantilla (Seafood CRC), Nathan McMurdo (WCIT) and in front, Pat O’Brien (WCIT)
Seafood businesses can find out about the safety requirements and quality parameters of their packaged products thanks to new packaging guidelines, *Safe Packaged Seafood: A Guide to Identifying Food Safety Hazards and Determining the Shelf-life of Packaged Seafood Products*.

Included with this edition of SeaFOOD Magazine, the guide provides clear and easy to understand information on safety and quality factors to consider when developing new packaged products.

Identifying potential food safety hazards and testing methods is an important part of developing new seafood products and the guide, the first of its type in Australia, helps businesses identify potential hazards and appropriate control measures to enable finfish, crustacean and mollusc products to be packaged safely and to a high quality standard.

In addition to hazard identification, it contains information on Australian regulatory requirements; processing and packaging options; how to assess product quality and safety; and how to determine shelf-life. The guide should be in conjunction with HACCP based food safety programs.

It is hoped that the guide will help people who are using or want to use technologies that extend shelf-life of packaged seafood products, such as modified atmosphere packaging (MAP) and vacuum packaging, and will help reduce costs associated with unnecessary testing of new products.

Researchers at the South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI), supported by the Seafood CRC, developed the guidelines in response to the revelation that foodborne pathogens, such as *Clostridium botulinum* and *Listeria monocytogenes*, usually considered to be of low risk in most seafood products may become high risk in new packaged products.

The guide is supported by a technical reference manual, *A Guide to the Identification of Food Safety Hazards and Determination of Shelf-life of Packaged Seafood*, targeted at quality assurance officers, processing operators, and new product development officers in seafood businesses.

The technical manual is the ultimate resource for appropriate methods to use for food safety and quality assessments, containing 16 food safety hazard fact sheets. It also identifies food safety hazards at all steps of the supply chain from pre- to post-harvest including processing of each key seafood type (i.e. molluscs, crustaceans and finfish) and product formats (i.e. modified atmosphere packaged, cold smoked, hot smoked and canned).

The guide included with this magazine has been developed for a non-technical audience to ensure the guidelines are accessible at all levels of industry, including those without a scientific background.

SARDI and the Seafood CRC congratulate all researchers who contributed to this project, in particular the Principal Investigator, Sutasinee Anantanawat, along with Catherine McLeod, Tom Madigan, Stephen Pahl, Ian Stewart, Karen McNaughton and Alison Turnbull.

The guide and technical reference manual are available free on the SafeFish website (safefish.com.au) and seafoodcrc.com website.
Included with this edition of SeaFOOD Magazine, the guide provides clear and easy to understand information on safety and quality factors to consider when developing new packaged products.

**FAST FACTS**

**HAZARD ID**
- A hazard has potential to cause harm to human health.
- Hazard identification is a critical part of developing a food safety plan.

**REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS**
- The Food Standards Code is available at foodstandards.gov.au.
- The Primary Production and Processing Standard for Seafood is given in Standard 4.2.1.
- International requirements for food safety purposes are available at frdc.com.au/trade.
- A list of accredited laboratories is available at nata.asn.au.

**PROCESSING AND PACKAGING**
Processing and packaging techniques can:
- Increase shelf-life.
- Introduce texture and flavour.
- Provide convenience.
- Assist with branding and labelling.

**SHELF-LIFE DETERMINATION**
- Seafood processing companies must label packaged products with either a use-by or best-before date.
- Shelf-life assessment should consider product quality and food safety.
- The process of assessing shelf-life will vary for every product.
Better management of waste in the seafood industry could lead to greater market opportunities, improved returns and reduced costs for seafood operators.

That’s the focus of two new projects being conducted at Curtin University, supported by the Australian Seafood CRC and the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation.

The projects are looking at two “waste” opportunities for the seafood industry to find ways to get previously underutilised species to market and to identify new ways to value add seafood processing waste.

UNDERUTILISED SPECIES

The underutilised species project is analysing the 25,000 tonne pool of finfish not harvested or harvested for low value in Australia each year, and determining how key species can be used to produce high quality, fresh and processed products.

A range of species are not harvested due to specific challenges: poor consumer perception/knowledge, difficulty in processing, and relatively short shelf-lives therefore requiring an exacting supply chain to reach the market in satisfactory condition.

Other fish species are not harvested due to being caught in remote areas with inadequate support infrastructure, while others are discarded after being caught due to low market value or insufficient space for storage.

The project aims to analyse these challenges and determine a pathway to market for the species with most potential.

The first step has been to establish an underutilised species database that will list all the underutilised species and their challenges under harvesting, processing and marketing.

This database is being developed through consultation with a range of fisheries management agencies, members of the catching and processing sector, marketers and chefs.

After looking at the challenges, species on the list will then be prioritised, with the aim of taking two or three case study species to market. The database will be freely available through the Seafood CRC when completed.

While the database development is still in progress, the project has started to look at a potential pathway for underutilised Australian Salmon from Western Australia, which is recognised as large sustainable resource, but presently achieving low values in the market place.

Using previous Curtin research around optimising quality in fresh and frozen Australian salmon, and following collaborative commitment from the industry, best practice harvesting and processing methods were trialled to produce quality samples for new prospective markets. This included harvesting the species with an automated fish stunning machine, which has been successful in other species to help maintain quality at catch.

Samples (whole fish, headed and gutted trunks, fillets and loins) harvested and processed (including canning and smoking) under these methods have been dispatched to a range of domestic and export markets. The industry is currently pursuing feedback from these markets before deciding next steps.

OPTIONS FOR SEAFOOD PROCESSING WASTE

The second project aims to successfully launch at least two products produced from seafood processing waste into new markets including the institutional (eg aged care, hospitals) catering market.

An estimated 10,000 tonnes of Australian seafood processing waste is currently put in land-fills because it is produced in many disparate locations and in volumes too low for cost-effective processing on site.

As the cost of waste disposal and the potential value of...
Similar work showed that crab meat could also be recovered from sub-standard stock and incorporated into value added product. Subsequent investigations have also resulted in the extraction of rock lobster meat from legs and carapaces.

By-products increase, and consumers pay more attention to total product utilisation and food security, reducing and transforming seafood processing waste seems essential to add profitability to the Australian seafood industry.

Following a literature review and discussions with industry, the initial plan is to work with seafood processing waste at four different levels.

**LEVEL 1**
Developing efficient, effective and legal waste treatment and disposal methods on board and at processing facilities (eg creating a central waste depot where processing waste is stabilized or repurposed, that individual operators can use).

**LEVEL 2**
Using hydrolysis or other treatment of seafood processing waste for production of oil and/or hydrolysate for fertiliser or high protein meal application. Feed companies and nutritionists will provide advice on product development suitable for poultry, pig and possibly aquaculture feed.

**LEVEL 3**
Using more complex oil extraction methods to produce premium food grade oil from seafood processing waste. Investigate additional processing opportunities to improve the quality of the high protein meal produced.

**LEVEL 4**
High value products: for example extracting mince from finfish frames, rock lobster, crabs and prawns to produce reformed or extruded seafood products for institutional catering markets. Other opportunities at this level include incorporating dried/extruded seafood waste products with grains into long life food for emergency relief and extraction of high value products such as chitin and collagen for pharmaceutical products.

Level 2 and 3 options are being progressed with some on site and laboratory trials with SAMPI (sampi.com.au), located in Port Lincoln, where around 3000 tonnes per year of tuna waste are currently processed. SAMPI have traditionally produced a hydrolysate for agricultural purposes. Recreational fishing oil and baits have also been produced. However, through this project Curtin University is now working with SAMPI to investigate changing the existing extraction/hydrolysis processes to produce a high quality oil and hydrolysate for pharmaceutical and feed markets. As it is expected the principles will apply across a range of species, similar feed and oil extraction trials have been run in the Curtin University pilot plant with waste from Atlantic salmon, Australian salmon, Snapper, trevally and Patagonian toothfish processing.

Level 4 options are being progressed based on previous research conducted by the Australian Seafood CRC that demonstrated between 15-30% of extra finfish product could be recovered from finfish frames using a meat extractor.

Similar work showed that crab meat could also be recovered from sub-standard stock and incorporated into value added product. Subsequent investigations have also resulted in the extraction of rock lobster meat from legs and carapaces.

A new project Curtin University project with Abacus Fisheries and a number of other leading WA seafood companies will investigate mechanical separation of material from seafood waste streams and reforming of this material by alginate and extrusion technologies. The resulting products will be targeted at the aged care and hospital markets. An end-user driven accelerated new product development framework successfully developed in a previous Seafood CRC project will be used in the new project.
Felicity is using the life cycle assessment tool to measure the environmental impact of the entire supply chain (ie from harvest to retail) of several Western Australian seafood businesses. The costs of these impacts to the businesses will be measured and cleaner production strategies recommended. Results so far have indicated the areas of greatest greenhouse gas emissions to be methane from fish waste, refrigeration gas leakage and polystyrene cooler production. Strategies to reduce these greenhouse gas emissions are under investigation.

RESULTS SO FAR:

• Calculated the quantity of carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide (greenhouse gases) released in the process of harvesting, processing and retailing fish fillets.

• Found three major hotspots that release the most greenhouse gases and now investigating methods of reducing this:

  1. Recycling filleting waste, rather than disposing it, reduces the methane produced in landfill and provides a potentially saleable product.

  2. Refrigeration leakage leads to greenhouse gas emissions and can be reduced by maintaining equipment.

  3. Alternatives to using polystyrene coolers to store seafood, which do not compromise on product quality.
Networking for new ideas

EMILY MANTILLA

Sharing new ideas and seeing best practice in action were some of the most popular features of a two-day pilot Australian Seafood Retailer’s Network workshop and tour held in Sydney in March this year.

The idea grew out of a need expressed by retailers to collaboratively address everyday business challenges. Running a business is hard work and it helps to know there are like-minded people that are facing the same issues you are. It’s about collaborating, sharing experiences and ideas to support each other, to be the best seafood retailers you can be.

The Network event began with a tour visiting three outstanding businesses, identified in the Sydney area as leaders in retailing.

These were De Costi Seafoods in Chatswood Chase and Peter Roan Seafoods in Top Ryde City – which presented interesting case studies about seafood retailing in a shopping centre environment – and Victor Churchill Butchers in Woollahra (victorchurchill.com) a world class retailer put on the map for their exceptional customer experiences, high quality products, beautiful shop fit out and intensive staff induction processes.

All the retailers came away from the tour with bright ideas about how to change their displays and present seafood a little differently, how to use lighting in their stores more effectively and how they can better train their staff.

The second day of the Network gathering consisted of a Sydney Fish Market tour, allowing retailers to see the seafood supply chain in action and learn more about how seafood gets sold to wholesalers before being delivered to their stores.

The tour was followed by an interactive workshop with guest speaker Sue Anderson from the Australian Retailer’s Association, who provided a thought provoking presentation on visual merchandising and how retailers can make their best impression with their customers.

Retailers were brimming with ‘ah ha’ moments and discussing ideas about how they can enhance the customer experience in their shops.

The Network workshop and tours were also a great chance for the Seafood CRC to help spread the word about the multitude of retailer resources that they have developed over the last seven years.

These include the CRC’s research on consumer insights – what consumers really think, how they behave, and what it means for their business (http://seafoodconsumerresearch.com/consumer-research/fish-bites-series/factsheets/) and FishFiles (fishfiles.com) a one-stop seafood information resource developed by the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation.

Case studies were also presented showcasing innovative seafood retailing initiatives and their impact and a session was undertaken on the Love Australian Prawns campaign to seek feedback on what worked and what didn’t work from a retailer perspective in year one as well as to have their input into the planning of year two activities.

Networkers were extremely positive about the two days with 100% of attendees claiming they would attend another Retailer’s Network event. Retailers also made some firm commitments about the things they were going to change in-store once they returned to their businesses.

Comments included:
• I’m going to evaluate my current displays and check for relevant product positioning.
• I’m going to check my signage and enhance the availability of resources for my customers in my shop.
• I’m going to re-engage with the contacts made and keep them going.
• I’m going to get hold of all the CRC resources mentioned for my customers and for use in staff inductions.
• I’ve got to create an online presence for my store.
• I need to think of ways to motivate my staff and engaged them in training.
• I’m going to download the FishFiles videos and have them on monitors in my shop.
• I need to focus more on staff training and their development as the “face” of my business.
• I’m going to step aside and view my shop from the customer’s perspective.
• I’m going to re-install TV screens and add an iPad to the shop.
• I’m going to increase cooking displays and sampling.
• I’m going to educate customers using my own personal knowledge on how to use seafood to get the best out of it.

Retailers were brimming with ‘ah ha’ moments and discussing ideas about how they can enhance the customer experience in their shops.

The Seafood CRC is planning to run another Australian Seafood Retailer’s Network in Hobart in October and a session in March on the Gold Coast, as well as a number of activities to support young retailers such as a “Retailer’s Rookie Club” to help them attend personal development opportunities and to help them to collect and analyse sales data.

The Network will also create a series of best practice retailer training videos and regular communication updates highlighting opportunities pertinent to the seafood retailer world.
RETAILERS NETWORK

Have you heard of the Australian Retailer’s Association’s very successful Future Leaders Catalyst Program? The program offers four engaging and relevant retail workshops and access to industry leading retail mentors to drive change.

The Federal Government Productivity Education and Training Grant covers 85% of the $2,500 program fees so it’s great value for money and a fantastic opportunity to take your business to the next level.

The ARA also runs regular tenancy workshops which provide retailers with the knowledge and confidence to successfully negotiate retail leases. Attendees will learn about the Retail and Commercial Leases Act 1995 and their rights and responsibilities as well as the fundamentals on how to research and evaluate retail leases terms.

Contact the ARA. Free call 1300 368 041.

NETWORK FEEDBACK

“The network was a fantastic initiative, adopting a unified, industry wide approach to retail seafood marketing will develop a stronger brand for Australian seafood. I found it really beneficial to have access to high calibre industry professionals allowing us to think on a more strategic level away from our operational day to day world.”

Andre Gorissen, Noosa Junction Seafood

“The Retailer’s Network was fantastic. It was a real eye opener seeing how other retailers market their product. I learnt so much. Meeting the other seafood retailers was also fantastic as we made some very valuable contacts in our industry. The whole experience was very worthwhile and fingers crossed we can attend the next network get together”.

Craig Fitzgerald, Debbie's Seafood

RETAILER TRAINING
Inspired by our winners? If you are a retailer who isn’t currently involved in the Love Australian Prawns campaign but would like to be, send us an email to support@australianprawnmarketing.net.

Five enthusiastic retailers were inaugural winners in the Love Australian Prawns “Dress Your Store” competition, announced at a gala event in Sydney last month.

Retailers from all over Australia submitted their store photographs to demonstrate how they got behind the Love Australian Prawns campaign and the Seafood CRC congratulates all finalists and winners.

1ST PRIZE
FISHERMEN’S WHARF SEAFOODS, NELSON BAY
Business partners Joanne Howarth and Peter Hofbauer and their team, were awarded $1,000 from Graeme Stewart from the Australian Council of Prawn Fisheries and Helen Jenkins from the Australian Prawn Farmers Association. Their brightly themed store won on the basis of original use of materials, commitment to the best presentation of the product as well as staff involvement and enthusiasm.

JOINT RUNNER UPS
DEBBIE’S SEAFOOD, MACKAY
Debbie’s Seafood is the largest seafood retailer in Mackay with a fleet of vending trucks and 20 employees. Assistant Business Manager, Craig Fitzgerald and Retail Manager, Clinton Bowers happily accepted their Retailer Display award of $500.

PETER ROAN SEAFOODS
Peter Roan from Peter Roan Seafoods was thrilled to accept his award of $500 as joint runner up in the competition. The Peter Roan Seafood approach is to be hands-on and from the beginning the business tried to establish customer preferences for seafood and set out to cater for those demands.

HIGHLY COMMENDED
CATCH SEAFOODS, TUGGERAH
Formerly De Costi’s Seafoods, Catch Seafoods is based at Tuggerah on the Central Coast of NSW. This award and a $250 prize was a welcome win for Sam Hutchison and his team which is operating under new management and rebranding the business. Catch prides itself on an innovative supply chain structure, offering customers more than just seafood as a main meal but also snacking solutions and salads.

SMITHY’S SEAFOODS
Smithy’s Seafoods is famous among grey nomads visiting Boyne Island and Tannum Sands and is also much loved by locals. Owner Brenda Smith and Store Manager Mel Achilles were excited to accept the award and $250 in prize money.
Did you know that each year an estimated 10,000 tonnes of Australian seafood processing waste is consigned to land-fill? Imagine if that by-product of our industry could be converted to a cash flow earner, and what impact that would have on processor profitability.

This is exactly the focus of Seafood CRC researcher Dr Janet Howieson’s work at Curtin University in Western Australia.

The common industry view that Janet and her colleagues are challenging is that seafood waste is produced in some many geographically diverse locations in such relatively small volumes that it is uneconomical to process.

However, Janet is showing that the economic equation is changing as both the cost of waste disposal and the value of potential by-products both increase.

Janet and her industry partners are breaking down prejudices (that it is too expensive to process waste) and are researching and trialling options that could overcome the economic and logistical challenges – such as keeping waste safe and suitable for reprocessing after travelling long distances.

Janet’s work is complemented by Felicity Denham’s research, also at Curtin University, which is assessing the whole seafood processing lifecycle and finding ways to reduce the carbon footprint of the industry – a study which is already paying dividends to the companies involved.

We also have some enthusiastic and talented researchers working on seafood waste in other parts of the country. Researchers from the Queensland Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and from the South Australian Research and Development Institute are working with large and small industry partners to problem solve waste issues.

Janet’s ultimate mission is to develop at least two commercial products especially targeted at the institutional catering market such as hospitals and aged care facilities where protein and nutrient value, flavour and texture are important.

We have to be realistic – our work to produce value added human consumption products, competes with the global fish oil, fish meal and pet food industries, which are the other major users of seafood waste.

But if we can develop new small-scale technologies and perhaps collaborative systems which can be shared by several producers, we will hopefully make a significant difference to the bottom line of seafood businesses al over Australia.

How can you be involved in this exciting opportunity? The Seafood CRC wants to hear about your waste management challenges and ways you have tackled the problem. Innovation often starts at the coalface and we have the people with skills and insights who can help.

But perhaps the first step is to take a closer look at what is in your waste bin – you might find that it contains some much needed cash!