Vacuum packing adds value

AUSTRALIAN WILD ABALONE PROGRAM TAKES OFF IN CHINA
I have the sad news to report to all our SeaFOOD magazine readers that the Board of the Seafood CRC has decided not to proceed with the application for an extension (re-bid) of the CRC beyond June 2015. At a special meeting on 5 February to examine the progress of the application, the Board agreed that there was not a compelling case on which to frame an application that had any chance of success.

The Australian Government Department of Industry guidelines state that a CRC proposal must:
Deliver significant economic, environmental and social benefits to Australia by supporting end-user driven research partnerships between publicly funded researchers and end-users to address clearly articulated, major challenges that require medium to long-term collaborative efforts.

To be successful in the competitive CRC process, our application needed to have significant cash commitments from potential participants. Unfortunately, while there were some organisations and enterprises that were keen to commit, the Board considered that the suite of research proposed lacked sufficient ‘breakthrough’ elements, and the total of funds offered too low for the application to proceed.

The Board acknowledges the significant achievements under the auspices of the Seafood CRC through its leadership and investment in projects across the whole seafood supply chain. There are still many outputs to be delivered under the current CRC, and the Board is confident that this decision will better enable our staff to concentrate on delivering maximum benefit to participants in the time remaining.

I thank all of you who have contributed to developing the application by indicating support, attending workshops and providing technical input. I am sure this effort will not be wasted as much of the information generated could be used as a basis for applications to other funding sources. I strongly believe there are future exciting opportunities for company specific projects to secure some significant government funding over the next 10 years.

If you would like to discuss this decision in more detail please contact me at len.stephens@seafoodcrc.com or on 08 8201 7651 or any of our staff in the Seafood CRC office.

Len Stephens
Managing Director
len.stephens@seafoodcrc.com
West Australian seafood producer Abacus Fisheries has just sold its one millionth Blue Swimmer crab cake – a remarkable local innovation success story thanks to Seafood CRC research.

The product was developed back in mid 2011 as part of a Seafood CRC Accelerated New Product Development project (SeaFOOD Magazine October 2011) run by Curtin University in conjunction with Abacus.

Project leader Dr Janet Howieson said the main market that had evolved for the cakes was finger food/appetisers at large functions and events, and the demand was growing from satisfied existing customers and new enquiries.

“The biggest obstacle is getting efficient distribution channels in place so we can meet demand from new customers,” Peter Jecks, owner of Abacus said. “But distributors need to see the demand before taking the product, so marketing by producers is very important.”

Abacus has built on the crab cake success with a new range of value added products from their Carnarvon factory.

These include seafood shots (pure prawn; prawn with tom yum Kaffir lime and pineapple sauce centre; and Atlantic Salmon with cream wasabi and sesame sauce centre) as well as frozen Wild Caught Shark Bay King Prawn burgers.

Abacus is also developing lobster value add products under contract for an external customer. The Stock Merchant won a 2011 Delicious award for a stock based on Abacus Blue Swimmer crab.

“The Jecks family which runs Abacus is committed to value adding, not only as a cost efficiency but as an environmental sustainability strategy, which makes the most of a premium resource,” Janet said.

Identifying potential food safety hazards and testing methods is an important part of developing new seafood products. SARDI, in a project funded by the Australian Seafood CRC, is producing a guide on how to determine shelf-life and identify food safety hazards associated with packaged seafood products.

The guide will identify potential hazards associated with finfish, crustacean and mollusc species that need to be managed effectively to ensure that packaged seafood products using those species are safe and of high quality. It will also contain links to information regarding food regulatory requirements for domestic consumption and export.

The guide will be supported by a comprehensive technical reference manual to assist seafood industry personnel – including new product development officers, quality assurance officers, operational managers and small to medium sized seafood companies – to assess food safety and quality attributes of their products.

The guide and reference manual will be freely accessible via the SafeFish website at www.safefish.com.au. A free copy will be included in the next edition of SeaFOOD with further copies able to be ordered by contacting the Seafood CRC.
Earlier this year the Australian Seafood CRC facilitated a Packaging Masterclass at integrated packaging solutions company, Multivac at its Tullamarine, Victoria head office.

Multivac is a leading manufacturer worldwide of innovative and appealing consumer products and the Masterclass not only showcased a wide array of packaging equipment, but also provided opportunities for participants to “get their hands dirty” in practical sessions.

Smaller capacity vacuum packaging machines and manual and semi-automatic tray sealing units allowed delegates to experiment with pouches and pre-formed rigid trays. These machine styles are ideal for businesses that are starting to experiment with packaging.

High volume thermoforming machines were also on display. In these machines, the packets are formed on the machine and an extensive range of packaging styles and sizes can be achieved with the ability to use either modified atmosphere or vacuum packaging styles.

An increasingly popular format with vacuum packaged products is to have a semi-rigid backing with a clear film ‘draped’ across the seafood. This technique results in a highly visible, attractive product that will also provide benefits in terms of shelf-life.

The latest in weighing, labelling and metal detection were also on display.

A stand out from the day was the new MYLAR® COOK film from DuPont Teijin Films™ that provides exciting opportunities for packaging as well as marketing seafood.

This film allows packaged products (including vacuum and modified atmosphere packaged) to be cooked within the package yet still allows the product to brown. As a result, products can be cooked either in an oven, microwave or sandwich press and result in a healthy dish that is easy to prepare with little mess.

Not only did attendees have the chance to see the packaging film being applied, they also had the chance to sample products such as baked fish, prawns and roasted meats for lunch – with very positive comments.

To complement the hands on sessions, researchers from the Seafood CRC Post Harvest Processing Hub gave presentations on the need to consider consumers first with regard to product development; the usefulness of modified atmosphere packaging systems and how these work; the benefits of including natural food ingredients to extend shelf-life and the latest trends from the recent Seafood Expo in Brussels.

Barry Rallis, of The One That Got Away seafood shop in Sydney also presented a case study on how installing a thermoforming machine had greatly assisted growth in his business.

The Seafood CRC would like to run another of these informative and hands on sessions in 2014.
Big returns for Fishermen’s Wharf Seafoods and Bub’s

JOANNE HOWARTH

Having an in-house vacuum packing facility has been a bonus for Nelson Bay fish wholesaler and retailer Jo Howarth, who has boosted her turnover by more than a million dollars in the last year, through packaging innovation.

Jo has run Fishermen’s Wharf Seafoods (and popular Bub’s Famous Fish and Chips which is an institution for New South Wales north coast travellers and locals) for more than ten years.

While the business has won an armful of seafood excellence awards over the last decade, Jo (who has an Economics degree and an MBA) is constantly re-inventing the wholesale and fresh and cooked retail offer to sustain growth.

After attending the Seafood CRC’s Packaging Masterclass, she returned home “motivated and energised” and decided to offer vacuum packaging of fresh fish as a free extra.

Her business already had two $50,000 vacuum machines that weren’t being used to their potential, but it was the workshop that stimulated Jo’s thinking about value adding.

“We learnt about the latest vacuum packing techniques and how that provided a new selling proposition,” she said.

“Consumers have a perception that fresh fish is very perishable and has to be used on the day of purchase.

“By vacuum packing we can extend the shelf life in their fridge up to five days and in the freezer for at least a month.

“It allows them to enjoy seafood when they want to, rather than on the day of purchase which doesn’t always suit the family.”

Jo said that despite the extra cost she chose not to charge for the vacuum packaging service.

“It’s a customer value add, a chance to go the extra mile,” she said. “Now we are finding that people from neighbouring areas such as the Hunter Valley, Maitland, Cessnock and Newcastle are rolling up with eskies because they can keep the fish longer – so that generosity has definitely boosted sales.”

Apart from shop retail sales the vacuum packing machines have also helped her business secure two profitable internet based shopping contracts.

“We pitched for these two accounts with companies doing internet sales of groceries, giving them an option of either a traditional tray sealed with plastic on the top, which doesn’t present well or a vacuum pack product,” Jo said.

“We gave them a couple of different prototypes and they chose the simple cryvac pack.

“With our two machines we can pack 24 units a minute and the customers are loving that the product maintains its freshness and there is no spillage or smell. Due to its compact size, the companies have benefitted through reduced freight costs, and the package presents beautifully and fits well within a home delivered box of groceries.”

As well as extra profitability, vacuum packing has given the sales staff another proposition for customers.

“Initially there was a bit of resistance from staff as it seemed like another job which would be time consuming and slow them down,” Jo said. “But they have found that offering a new complimentary service gives them another way to engage customers.”

She recommended the CRC’s packaging and marketing research programs.

“Too many small business owners work IN the business rather than ON the business,” she said. “Retailers should be more supportive of the good work the CRC is doing and access its training, workshops and information packages which are often free or very low cost yet have the potential to provide huge opportunities.”
One of the greatest opportunities for seafood processors and retailers over the next decade will be meeting the increasing demand for packaged seafood products.

Consumer demands for conveniently packaged seafood with extended shelf life will be balanced by increasing expectations for assurance that foods are safe to eat.

Fortunately, there is now a wide range of packaging options for seafood suppliers, according to SARDI Food Safety and Innovation researcher Stephen Pahl, who has just completed a comprehensive review of innovative packaging systems.

“Once upon a time packaging was only required to do one job – create a barrier between the product and the external environment,” Stephen said.

“Packaging materials such as paper, cardboard, foil or plastic were originally designed to simply protect the food against spoilage.

“But over time we have grown to expect packaging to enhance product convenience, to communicate product information and make the transport of perishable and non-perishable goods easier.

“Now processors want packaging to meet changing demands for better food safety, assist in brand differentiation, extend shelf-life and make products more convenient for customers.

To meet these demands Stephen said packaging innovators had developed new packaging formats that were classed as active and intelligent.

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He said these new forms of packaging were particularly important for the seafood sector where the product is prone to microbial change and the development of odours and drip loss.

“Active packaging includes the deliberate inclusion of specific compounds into packaging systems that release or absorb substances to maintain or prolong the product quality,” Stephen said.

“Most active packaging technologies are used in conjunction with modified atmosphere packaging and can include oxygen absorbers (to prevent oxidation), carbon dioxide emitters (to inhibit microorganism growth), moisture absorbers, odour scavengers and antimicrobial systems which inhibit spoilage.”

Stephen said intelligent packaging systems are used to detect temperature abuse or a loss in packaging integrity which can lead to spoilage.

“These include time-temperature indicators or TTIs to detect thermal damage, integrity indicators to detect physical pack damage and microbial indicators.

“The evolution of radio frequency identification systems (RFID) has also led to reduced unit costs, and these are now being considered by seafood producers as a way to ensure product safety.”

For example Ceebron’s Smart-Trace solution had been specially developed for the online monitoring of perishables in cold-chain distribution, Stephen said. The tags are a disposable device that when activated wirelessly transmit the data to a central serve and overcome the practical issue of recovering the tag in order to download the data.

Optical bio-sensors were another new development which could help detect microbial spoilage.

These include the Food Sentinel System to detect pathogens being developed by SIRA Technologies (USA) and the Toxin Guard system incorporated an antibody-based test for the detection of pathogens. The system has been developed to a semi-commercial state by Toxin Alert (Canadian).

Stephen said the cost of using these more advanced technologies often depended on the purchase volumes and may have to be restricted to higher-valued products.

“However, packaging is also becoming a marketing tool. Several studies in the US have indicated that a majority of consumers feel that products are of a better quality if they are packaged with TTIs and we can expect this trend to come to Australia.”

Stephen said his study Review of Innovative Packaging: Active, Smart and Intelligent Systems will be available in early 2014. Processors and suppliers who were considering upgrading their packaging using new technologies can obtain a copy or discuss their own packaging trials by contacting him at SARDI.
### Table 1 Active packaging

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Typical Applications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oxygen absorbers</td>
<td>Prevent oxidation of fats, oils, vitamins and colours</td>
<td>Dried and smoked seafood products with a water activity &lt;0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inhibit growth of aerobic microorganisms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carbon dioxide emitters</td>
<td>Inhibit growth of some microorganisms</td>
<td>Modified atmosphere packs, especially with reduced gas to product ratio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reduces packaging collapse due to the CO₂ solubility of food</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moisture absorbers</td>
<td>Enhances products appearance by absorbing drip</td>
<td>Packaged seafood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Removes excess moisture that can promote growth of microorganisms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Absorb melting ice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odour scavengers</td>
<td>Absorb protein degradation products including amines and aldehydes</td>
<td>Packaged seafood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antimicrobial systems</td>
<td>Inhibit microbial growth</td>
<td>Packaged seafood</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2 Intelligent packaging

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Typical Mechanism of Operation</th>
<th>Typical Applications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time-temperature indicators</td>
<td>Respond if a packet has been thermally abused and product safety and quality may be compromised</td>
<td>Colour changing indicator attached to the outside of a pack. Rate of colour changes are based on the extent of chemical, enzymatic or microbiological reactions</td>
<td>Packaged seafood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrity detectors</td>
<td>Respond if a packet has been damaged and product safety and quality may be compromised</td>
<td>Colour changing indicator attached to the inside of a pack. Colour change based on the absorption or diffusion of gases (frequently oxygen and carbon dioxide) from a gas sensitive dye</td>
<td>Modified atmosphere packs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microbial indicators</td>
<td>Respond if the product safety is compromised</td>
<td>Colour changing indicator attached to the inside of a pack. Colour change associated with immunochemical based detection of specific pathogens or toxins</td>
<td>Packaged seafood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshness indicators</td>
<td>Respond to changes in product quality</td>
<td>Colour changing indicator attached to the inside of a pack. Colour change based on the interaction of a dye with volatile bases (i.e. ammonia and trimethylamine)</td>
<td>Packaged seafood</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MARKETING

Sharing the love
MILES TOOMEY

This is the first co-ordinated national campaign for a seafood category and early feedback suggests it has been a significant success, with a reported spike in sales in some outlets of up to 50%.
The prawn industry around Australia has contributed over $350,000 to fund the implementation of a “Love Australian Prawn” strategy after a year of Seafood CRC consumer research, industry consultation, marketing strategy development and branding.

The strategy and the “Love Australian Prawns” campaign was launched around Australia between July and October with some already impressive results.

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The Australian Prawn Marketing Strategy uses the strong emotional associations the nation has with prawns (literally, we love them) to encourage consumption outside the traditional peak times of Christmas and Easter.

The goal is to achieve off-peak season sales without cheapening or commoditising prawns, instead giving consumers reasons to celebrate more often and seek out Australian product – redefining the word “celebration”.

As well as the new “Love Australian Prawns” brand icon, three visual scenarios were created and made into posters to remind people at point of sale to purchase more prawns. Easy to follow recipes were also developed containing luscious imagery of all types of Australian prawns.

Over the three month period 750,000 recipe booklets were distributed to 825 Woolworths stores nationally providing an immediate spike in sales at supermarkets.

High quality point of sale packs featuring posters, cabinet stickers, recipes, external A-Frame signs, counter cards and more were also sent to 377 independent seafood retailers, along with instructions on how to theme stores and use the materials to best effect.

These materials, which will last several years, are now being used nationwide. Again, early feedback suggests that there has been a direct effect on sales.

In November the Love Australian Prawn campaign was launched to the Australian consumer via media. A Love Australian Prawn competition asked consumers to join in the fun of sharing their favourite prawn moment/memory/recipe, resulting in significant media exposure in newspapers and radio nationally. The campaign also entered the social media space featuring on two influential food blogs and appearing in Twitter conversations.

With the establishment of these new retailer relationships and the achievement of a united approach based on the careful use of industry funds, this project had laid the foundation for future campaigns, not just for Australian prawns, but the entire seafood sector.

The Australian Prawn Marketing Strategy is a joint industry program undertaken by the Australian Council of Prawn Fishers (ACPF), the Australian Prawn Farmers Association (APFA) with the support of the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC) and the Seafood CRC.
AUSTRALIAN WILD ABALONE PROGRAM TAKES OFF IN CHINA

JAYNE GALLAGHER
The recent premiere of the Australian Wild Abalone™ program in Hong Kong attracted more than 150 people involved in the Food and Beverage sector in Hong Kong, Macau and southern China. The premiere also attracted a lot of local media attention focused on the food safety and sustainability credentials of Australian wild caught Abalone. The program will now roll out into mainland China with a focused supply chain education program planned for 2014 and 2015.

The success of the Hong Kong event was due to the level of knowledge and understanding of the needs of the supply chain from producer, exporter, Chinese importer, customers and end users that has been obtained through three years of intensive market research and development by the Seafood CRC and members of the Australian wild caught abalone industry. The Australian Wild Abalone™ program was developed to meet the challenge of increasing competition and declining returns in the once lucrative Chinese market.

It was revealed at the Seafood CRC CRAM conference in May that prices for wild abalone have dropped from $46.30/kg in 2000 to $39.73/kg in 2010 – in real terms a cut in returns by as much as 50% for some producers. This is partly a result of a decline in Chinese government sponsored banquets and also a traditional view that abalone is a luxury food only consumed on special occasions.

The AWA™ program is addressing this market challenge through a “trust mark” co-branding campaign and focuses on the opportunities presented by the economic, political and social changes in China – in particular the more frequent, contemporary-style dining practised by the emerging “Mass Affluents” class in China.

The industry has worked strategically over the last three years to create the Australian Wild Abalone™ Certification Mark. Using its state of the art provenance protection technology, the industry can now guarantee a high quality, safe and sustainable product to importers and their customers.

The AWA™ Program is underpinned by a Quality Assurance Code of Practice from harvest to export which meets the food safety requirements of the Australian government and ensures that the product is healthy and nutritious.

One of the program’s key marketing points of difference is that Australian wild abalone is hand harvested by divers under strict management controls to ensure the sustainability of the fisheries. Australian Wild Abalone has recently been recognized by the World Wildlife Fund as a responsible seafood choice.

In all, 35 different abalone import companies attended the briefing sessions and were awarded AWA™ Foundation Partner Certificates. Dean Lisson, Abalone Council Australia Ltd Executive Chairman, said the Hong Kong premiere event followed importer seminars in September and June. We now have 10 Abalone exporters and 35 Abalone importers signing up to be part of the program and we are now ready to commence trialing and evaluating our market activation strategy for the next 12 months and beyond,” Dean said.

“Due to the significant reduction in Chinese Government sponsored banquets, we need to target the non-Government sector within the domestic Chinese market to create awareness of and preference for Australian wild abalone products.

“Restaurants in China are currently adapting to the changes by focussing more on their corporate and private individual/family clients – the AWA™ Program will work with the abalone supply chain and their clients in the Chinese food and beverage sector to target these consumers.

The Australian Wild Abalone™ program is a joint initiative of the Abalone Council Australia Ltd (ACA) and the Abalone Association of Australasia Inc. (AAA) developed with the support of the Seafood CRC and the Australian Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC).
SafeFish News:
Food Safety – Essential Knowledge for Seafood Businesses

ALISON TURNBULL

The recent food safety incident in Bali where tragically two people died, most likely as a result of Scombroid Fish Poisoning associated with a seafood meal, highlights the need to understand and manage food safety risks in all seafood businesses. While the likelihood of a food safety incident is extremely rare according to media reports at the time, (the likelihood of two people dying from Scombroid Fish Poisoning is estimated to be about 20 million to one) the consequences can be quite devastating. Often the effects of an incident are felt by the whole sector not just the business involved.

SafeFish has been working with the seafood industry to address high priority food safety issues in a strategic manner. This has improved trade and market access and built capability in Australia to deal with seafood food safety issues as they arise. SafeFish has a number of publications and fact sheets about the major food safety risks associated with seafood. We thought it was timely to remind people that these resources exist to help you assess and manage the food safety risks in your business and as it is topical we have provided some facts and information about Scombroid Fish Poisoning in this issue.

What is Scombroid Fish Poisoning?
Scombroid Fish Poisoning is caused by ingestion of histamine, a product of the degradation of the amino acid histidine. Histidine is found in the muscles of some fish species and can be degraded to histamine by enzymatic action of some naturally occurring bacteria.

Which types of fish can be implicated?
Scombridae are the family of fish such as tuna and mackerel, which are traditionally considered to present the highest risk (hence the name Scombroid Fish Poisoning). However, other species have also been associated with histamine poisoning; e.g. anchovies, sardines, Yellowtail kingfish, Amberjack and Australian salmon, Mahi Mahi and Escolar.

Does Scombroid Fish Poisoning occur in Australia?
In Australia, 38 outbreaks of Scombroid Fish Poisoning were reported between 1988 and 2010. Both domestically harvested and imported fish have been implicated with disease. Illnesses occurred from seafood consumed both from restaurants and also from in home settings.

What are the symptoms?
Initial symptoms resemble some allergic reactions including: sweating, nausea, headache and tingling or a peppery sensation in the mouth and throat. Other symptoms include urticarial rash (hives), localised skin inflammation, vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal cramps, flushing of the face and low blood pressure. Severe symptoms include blurred vision, severe respiratory distress and swelling of the tongue.

What can be done to manage Histamine in seafood?
Histamine levels can increase over a wide range of storage temperatures. However, histamine production is highest over 21.8 °C. Once the enzyme is present in the fish, it can continue to produce histamine at refrigeration temperatures. Thus, rapid chilling of fish immediately after death, followed by good temperature control in the supply chain is the most appropriate control mechanism.
The recent food safety incident in Bali where tragically two people died, most likely as a result of Scombroid Fish Poisoning associated with a seafood meal, highlights the need to understand and manage food safety risks in all seafood businesses.

What is happening Internationally?
Histamine risk management guidelines are currently under review by the Codex Committee of Fish and Fishery Products. Discussion is centred on the appropriateness of the current maximum levels, the potential inclusion of safety factors to take into account sensitive individuals and children, sampling strategies to test for histamine in batches of seafood, the usefulness of a separate decomposition limit, and whether or not different products should have different maximum allowable levels. SafeFish is actively engaged in this discussion, and is providing technical support to the Australian delegate at the upcoming Codex Committee on Fish and Fish Products (CCFFP) meeting.

Codex – the international food standards setting organisation – will be conducting another round of committee meetings in 2014, and SafeFish is now seeking input from industry to support Australian negotiation positions at those meetings.

Key areas being discussed at the forthcoming Codex meetings include:
- A review of maximum histamine levels for fish and fishery products
- The development of a Code of Practice for smoked fish products
- Guidelines for fresh/frozen and live abalone and quick processing and freezing of scallops
- Continued development of criteria for marine biotoxins
- Development of the standard on food additives
- A review of methylmercury limits in fish

Working in partnership with the Australian Government SafeFish has undertaken research which has helped to achieve positive outcomes for industry, including ensuring that food safety regulations are based on a robust risk assessment that uses the best available research. SafeFish research has demonstrated that food safety risks are well managed in Australia and this in turn has avoided mandatory testing of marine biotoxins in abalone and vibrios and viruses in shellfish, which would have added cost without improving food safety outcomes.

SafeFish, which was developed by SARDI with Seafood CRC funding, provides technical advice to support Australia’s seafood industry and helps to resolve barriers to trade. If you might be impacted by the food safety issues being considered by Codex next year, it is important that you contact SafeFish to find out what the Australian position is and how you can have your input.
Seafood CRC research conducted by the University of the Sunshine Coast has discovered that consumers consider that Australian Barramundi is our “National” fish.

This is one of many insights gained from the Seafood CRC’s Repositioning Australian Farmed Barramundi project, which is now guiding individual Barramundi farmers, as well as the Australian Barramundi Farmers Association in their efforts to better market Australian farmed product.

The research project started in 2009, against a background of increasing production volume, declining prices and a global recession. Production had increased from 2700 tonnes in 2003/04 to 6000 tonnes in 2008/09 forcing down farm gate prices and because of the global financial crisis, consumers were not buying. Something had to change.

In response, research took a whole of chain approach, identifying opportunities at the wholesaler, retailer and consumer level. Some of the key findings were:

• Barramundi farmers didn’t really know what happened to their fish after it left the farm gate.
• Wholesalers and others in the supply chain, control the information flow from producers to end consumers (and vice versa).
• Consumers want to buy Australian Barramundi.
• Consumers are concerned about the risk of ‘getting it wrong’, due to not being overly familiar with how to select, store and cook Barramundi (like most fish).

As a result, several activities have occurred:

• Individual companies have used the insights to improve communication throughout the supply chain.
  Charles Heaphy, Farm Manager at King Reef said “The project provided valuable information to our sales team which helped them to relate to and engage better with our customers”.
• Individual companies have also changed their product labelling / branding to focus on the Australian origin of their product. Examples of this include Barramundi Gardens, and Coral Coast Barramundi
• An in-store trial of demonstrations coupled with recipe leaflets led to some companies organising additional demonstrations, and the development of the Moroccan Spiced Barramundi recipe cards, now available through the Master Fish Merchants Association of Australia (amfa.com.au)
• The Australian Barramundi Farmers Association has started work on developing an industry brand and marketing strategy, which will hopefully roll out during 2014.

So is it time you did a customer stocktake and think about what information your business provides to your customers? Ask yourself, do you communicate effectively with them about where product comes from? Do you assist your customers with their selection of seafood and help them with tips for storage and cooking? Are you taking benefit of all the great resources out there available to help you engage with your customer? ⚫

*In the May 2012 edition of SeaFOOD stories (page 2) we showcased the Barramundi recipe cards and how Andre Gorissen from Noosa Junction Seafood Market is using the consumer research to boost his sales and in the September 2013 edition of SeaFOOD (page 4) we showcased how Ken Chapman from GTB Fisheries used the consumer research to change his branding to benefit his business.
Those who watch the Gruen Transfer on ABCTV know that advertising is all about “the big idea”. During 2013, second year Creative Advertising students at the University of the Sunshine Coast were given the chance to develop their own big ideas for seafood marketing on behalf of two WA Seafood industry groups: Cape Le Grande Sardines and South-West Australian Salmon producers.

The students worked in four teams with roles which mimicked an advertising agency creative department – a strategic planner, designer, client manager, copywriter and so on. Marketing briefs were prepared by Janet Howieson from Curtin University in WA and product was airfreighted, cooked and taste tested by the students before the creative sessions.

Of the four campaigns two winning campaigns were selected: Discover the Mediterranean Secret for Cape Le Grande Sardines; and WA Salmon Industry (WASI) – The Alternative for Australian Institutions.

The winning pitch was the sardine business-to-consumer (B2C) campaign which identified the link between sardines and the growing interest in Mediterranean food such as tapas. It recommended an integrated marketing campaign which included a new website, social media, chef endorsements, recipe cards, merchandise, car branding and in-store promotions focusing on a Spanish chica (or pretty girl).

The ‘WASI’ business-to-business (B2B) campaign targeted institutional catering at aged care facilities, mining camps and hospitals with the message that Wild Australian Salmon is a healthy, nutritious and low cost food alternative. The campaign recommended developing a WASI brand identity, undertaking trade show promotions, media, public relations and advertising in trade journals. Janet was so impressed with the campaign she presented it to South West Australian Salmon producers in November 2013.

The assessment panel led by Jayne Gallagher, Seafood CRC was excited about the level of research which informed the campaigns and the detail in the strategies and tactical implementation plans.

The same course in 2012 developed a campaign for the Australian Barramundi Farmers Association and again the work was of an exceptional standard. Given the high standard of these pitches, the Seafood CRC will be seeking to allocate two more seafood products or sectors to the course in 2014.
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.

I am excited as I look through the stories in this issue – a huge range of topics involving many industry partners and researchers from all over Australia! I am reminded though that this has not always been the case! It has only been just on six years since we started the CRC and when we started I quickly realised that for us to achieve the targets that the industry and government had set for us that we needed to significantly improve our capacity for out-of-the-water research. Over many years Australia has built a solid international reputation for fisheries management and aquaculture research but the same could not be said for our seafood post-harvest research. While there were pockets of expertise they were typically poorly funded and certainly not connected with each other.

Yes it has taken six years but together with our research providers we have found, trained and recruited people with expertise in seafood post-harvest research to meet the growing needs of our industry partners. More recently we brought this expertise together under the umbrella of the Seafood Post Harvest Research Hub with members from Curtin University, SARDI, UTAS, Queensland DAFF, University of Sunshine Coast and more recently CSIRO. People involved in this Hub have a wide range of expertise and knowledge and collectively they have access to state of the art equipment and technology.

As you can see from the range of articles in this and previous editions of SeaFOOD magazine the Hub members are experts in food safety, trade, market development, consumer insights, supply chain and value chain management, packaging, quality, sensory assessment, processing efficiency, waste utilisation – to name a few!

Building capacity is also about creating career pathways for young people. The Seafood CRC is also using this Hub to provide opportunities for students by engaging them in interesting close to market projects where their education and skills can be applied to practical industry problems. Similarly we support our young industry members by providing training opportunities and master classes (for young and old!).

The problem is that having built this capacity — which is now delivering real results to industry members — it will soon disappear if industry does not use it. As the current Seafood CRC draws to a close (due to shut its doors in June 2015) and the discussions about having a new CRC gain momentum NOW is the time for industry to show that it needs and values this capacity.

I urge you that if you have a seafood post-harvest research question, idea or need that you contact me or one of the members of the Hub. Even if the expertise and/or technology is not close to where you are Hub members can organise for you to get access or to talk to the right person. It takes a long time to build capacity and a very short time to lose it so have a read of the articles and take action today to find out more!