

Seafood a star as Martyn Dunne exits

Seafood was a strong performer in the latest primary sector export review.

The sector's exports returned \$1.8 billion in the year to June 30, according to the Ministry for Primary Industries' latest situation and outlook released this week.

And growth is forecast to crack the \$2 billion mark in mid-2020 thanks to an annual 6.4 percent increase over the next two years.

Increased aquaculture production, notably salmon and mussels, along with rising prices, is expected to lift aquaculture export revenue to \$500 million, up from a current \$406 million.

Rock lobster, mussels and hoki continued to be the top three export earners.

The Chinese, European and US markets have been growing, while Australian and Japanese demand has remained steady.

Prices are expected to remain high given the strong demand from our key markets, combined with lower levels of global supply of wild capture fisheries expected in coming years, the review said.

Overall primary sector exports reached a record high of \$42.7 billion, an exceptional increase of 11.8 percent.

The presentation at the Wellington Club was also the occasion of Martyn Dunne's retirement after five years as MPI director-general.

In paying tribute, Agriculture Minister Damien O'Connor said he had advised Dunne that MPI was not the Army and people did not have to obey his orders.

More subtle skills were needed.

“I think at times that became a challenge.”

Another challenge was “two years of being nice to Australians” in his role as High Commissioner to Australia.

Former Primary Industries Minister Nathan Guy, who worked closely with Dunne, said he always knew when the s*** was about to hit the fan as Dunne would start the conversation with a distinctive dry cough and Guy would think “here we go”.

His key saying was “don’t worry I’m going to grip this up” and he would, Guy said.

In a lengthy address, Dunne encompassed his years from a 17-year-old trainee schoolteacher to the military and diplomatic and public service.

He was formerly Comptroller of Customs and Commander Joint Forces New Zealand with the rank of major general.

As MPI head, Dunne dealt with numerous crises, including contaminated infant baby formula, a 1080 terrorist, Kauri dieback, microplasma bovis, bonamia, pea weevil, fruit fly and myrtle rust.

And what of his legacy in the seafood sector?

There has been a fair bit of foofing and faffing but little progress on fisheries reform.

A pan-primary sector cost recovery review has sunk without trace and the seafood industry is forced to continue to contribute \$30-35 million every year, \$12 million of which disappears into a black hole termed enforcement.

There is no transparency, no obligation to be cost effective, no strategy and no measurables.

But the industry has seen a move to electronic reporting, proposed for rollout across the entire fleet from early next year.

Overall though it could be argued the sector has prospered in spite of, rather than because of, MPI.

The bureaucracy was given a shake-up under new minister Stuart Nash, with the creation of a separate Fisheries New Zealand business unit within MPI, which Dunne opposed, but it is yet to find its feet.

Ray Smith, currently Corrections head, takes over as MPI director-general on Nov 1.

For a man of Dunne’s energy and drive, total retirement from public life at the age of 68 is unlikely to appeal and he may well pop up in another role.

In the meantime the drums are beating for a New Year gong to add to his New Zealand Order of Merit in recognition of an extraordinary record.

Arise, Sir Martyn?

Farmed snapper on its way to reality

Farmed New Zealand snapper could soon be a reality thanks to innovative new research taking place in Nelson.

Plant & Food Research senior scientist Maren Wellenreuther has spent several years researching how native marine finfish can be developed into farmable species.

The goal is to have commercially farmed snapper 'aquaculture-ready' within the next five to ten years.

"Overall, aquaculture is one of the fastest growing primary production areas in New Zealand, and just having three species doesn't make it very resilient. So our goal is to basically diversify what we can put in our farms," said Wellenreuther.

The research involves placing snapper in tanks and allowing them to spawn. Once this process has occurred, the eggs and larvae are reared to breeding maturity - approximately three years old.

"One of the issues we often encounter when we take a species from the wild and put them into a hatchery, is they often don't spawn," said Wellenreuther.

New Zealand snapper was the species of choice as it's a particularly hardy fish that adapts well to breeding in captivity, she explained.

Luckily the snapper adjusted well and spawned from the first year they were placed in the hatchery.

Boosting the growth-rate for commercially farmed snapper has also been a major focus.

Plant and Food research have been feeding the snapper a mix of extruded pellets, crushed mussels and a moist diet of fish and supplements to help increase their rate of development.

Growth is heavily dependent on temperature too, so conditions have been monitored closely to determine the best environment to raise the fish in.

So far, the results are promising.

"We've just started to develop our third generation ... we're hoping with one or two, maybe three, generations we'll have really fast-growing fish," said Wellenreuther.

"For the early life stages of snapper we were able to double the growth rate already, so we are quite confident that we can get them to grow to, say, 700 grams or one kilogram much faster."

Wellenreuther also developed a photographic 'fingerprint' as a way of identifying the fish without the lengthy process of tagging and measuring each one.

"We take an image of the fish, and using that image we can actually identify each individual in our hatchery.

"And I'm talking about thousands of different fish. With a very high accuracy – 99 percent accuracy. So the colour pattern of snapper, we've found, is absolutely unique to each individual and it's also stable over time."

Wellenreuther's efforts were recognised by the Royal Society Te Apārangi at their annual New Zealand Research Honours where she received the Hamilton Award for early career research excellence.

"This award is an acknowledgement of the importance of seafood to New Zealand, from both an export and a cultural perspective, and how science can be applied in new ways to support the food sector," she said.



Maren Wellenreuther at Plant & Food research facility. Photo credit: Plant & Food Research.

Artificial reefs for marine life

Artificial reefs could soon help revive marine life in the Marlborough Sounds.

Coastal scientist Dr Steve Ulrich presented the idea to the Marlborough environment committee last week as part of a marine sites survey and monitoring programme.

A report from July indicated human activities had major and widespread effects on marine environments.

"We had something akin to a Great Barrier Reef in the Marlborough Sounds, which has since been lost," said Ulrich.

Artificial reefs are needed due to the large amount of damage sustained by the region's natural reefs, explained Ulrich. Some have been completely destroyed.

NIWA's soundwave survey of Queen Charlotte Sound and Tory Channel in August found 10 artificial reefs – in the form of shipwrecks – already in the region.

Hippalos, the oldest of the wrecks, sunk in 1909 after striking Walker Rock. The wreck was known to divers in the area, but never scientifically mapped and has since become an underwater home.

Another video of a ship wreck in Queen Charlotte Sound was presented to the committee to demonstrate the wealth of marine species inhabiting these wrecks.

"You can see the profusion of fish life on these artificial reefs," Ulrich said. "You can see all these provide habitats for marine vertebrates and plants."

The idea is that artificial reefs would provide a new home for marine life to occupy while natural reefs regenerate. The structures would also attract a greater abundance of fish to the region.

Ulrich suggested reefs could be crafted from sustainable materials that are beneficial to the environment too.

Non-polluting materials like concrete blocks contain calcium carbonate which would help to offset ocean pH levels, said Ulrich.

The quantity of mussel shells sent to landfills each year could also be addressed with artificial reefs, he said. As they're calcium carbonate, the shells could be put back in the ocean as part of a reef and used to protect marine organisms against ocean acidification.

Ulrich urged the council to consider an artificial reef strategy in the near future so other degraded areas have the opportunity to recover.

"We [can] use that as a tool for sustainable management of our ecosystems, which then have flow-on effects in terms of our social, cultural and economical benefits that we can enjoy," he said.

Councillor Jenny Andrews said the council could look at reefs placed off St Helena Island in the 1980s and 1990s to understand what's happened to them 30 years on.



Sylvia brown announces her retirement

Sylvia Brown has announced she will be retiring at the end of 2018 and her service was recognised at the annual quota managers' meeting in Wellington last week.

At the start of her fisheries career, Sylvia worked in the Christchurch branch of the Ministry of Fisheries before being approached by Andre Kotzikas who offered her a position at United Fisheries.

Sylvia joined the United Fisheries team on the 26th February 1996 as a fishing and quota administration officer. Kotzikas says her true role has been supporting him with the responsibilities of fishing and quota management while helping vessel owners and crew with any issues they requested help with.

Kotzikas said Sylvia was a delight to work with and describes her as his guardian angel for close to 23 years.



News

Sealord have confirmed the search for its missing crewman has ended. Twenty five year old Pātahi Kawana Jnr was reported missing last Thursday morning after failing to report for duty on the *FV Otakou* which was fishing near Cape Palliser. Sealord promptly did a 'full muster' of personnel and notified authorities. Rescue teams worked through the night and into early Friday morning to find Pātahi but could not continue with the search due to deteriorating weather conditions. A spokesman from the Rescue Coordination Centre said the man was not wearing a life jacket at the time. Sealord said it was deeply saddened by the tragic event and extended sympathy and support to Pātahi's family, friends and colleagues. Lois Kawana, Pātahi's grandmother, is remaining hopeful that her grandson will return and said family are coping with his disappearance. She described Pātahi as a "wonderful boy who loved the sea" and despite being away a lot, he would keep in regular contact, always messaging her online. Sealord have said their internal investigation is ongoing.

A Whitianga commercial fisherman and his company have been fined more than \$8000 for failing to record almost 500kg of crayfish. William John Maclardy, 36, was convicted and

fined \$2250 when he appeared in the Thames District Court last week. His company, Maclardy Fishing Limited, was fined \$6000. MPI fishery officers discovered Maclardy hadn't completed the required catch effort landing returns for nine days during a routine vessel inspection off the coast of Whitianga in January this year. MPI spokesman Adam Plumstead said the offending is disappointing particularly given it happened in CRA2. Maclardy admitted he knew he had to complete the returns daily and put forward a number of personal circumstances for failing to do so. The crayfish sold for \$24130.90 and the funds were forfeited to the crown. Maclardy's \$100,000 fishing vessel was also forfeited to the crown.

Auckland University scientists are calling for an expansion of the Cape Rodney-Okakari Point (Goat Island) Marine Reserve, to stop crayfish numbers dwindling to an all-time low. The university operates the Leigh Marine Laboratory, and the reserve was originally set up for scientific research in 1975. When the reserve first opened, research into crayfish numbers indicated there were 10 per 500 square meters. As the reserve became more effective that figure grew to around 40, but now numbers have dropped back to 10. A Sea Change Plan, designed to enhance the Hauraki Gulf, proposes to extend the boundary out by a further 2.2km to 3km, however no time frames have been set for when the proposal might come into effect. Minister for Conservation Eugenie Sage says she can't comment on the specific proposal to expand the reserve, but says government agencies are working out the best way to progress the Sea Change Plan proposals.

Check out the latest Seafood Magazines