



# THE UPDATE

Captain's Blog



## Lucrative China trade the focus of rock lobster conference

China was the recurring topic at a gathering of the Australasian rock lobster industry in Queenstown this week.

The live lobster market, worth \$300 million to New Zealand in annual exports, is booming but there is also concern about such reliance on a single market.

Rabobank general manager food and agribusiness research for Australia and New Zealand, Tim Hunt, said China was a great match for Australasian producers, placing high value on clean, safe food.

China's rapid development was an economic miracle that had created 3.5 million millionaires.

The scale of wealth creation was such that there would be 5.5 million millionaires by 2021.

That dynamic was very favourable for high-end products like southern rock lobster.

Based on the current combined catch of about 12,000 tonnes, that was six crayfish per millionaire.

The US-China trade war, where virtually every product was now tariffed, created short term gains with less competition. But longer term there would be likely pain caused by slower economic growth, an end of trade liberalisation, and maybe having to choose sides, with the relationship with China becoming more difficult.

NZ Rock Lobster Industry Council chief executive Mark Edwards outlined a complex array of threats that could threaten the extraordinary success of the fishery and what could be done to address those.

The fishery was “the most valuable wild harvest species” and catches had been stable since the introduction of the Quota Management System (QMS).

And it was now far more efficient, with fewer boats, catch per unit effort as much as six times greater, less fuel use, less bait needed and better fishing for all sectors.

However, the rights-based framework that underpinned the QMS was incomplete in that the recreational catch formed a major proportion of the overall take in some fisheries.

The extent of the recreational catch was uncertain, compounded by a lack of willingness by the regulator to manage it.

Australia was more advanced in this area, with licensing in some states, and policies that included allocation of proportional shares, buy-backs of commercial entitlements, and compensation or offsets where recreational fishing displaced commercial fishing.

Another risk was that of whale entanglements in lobster pot lines given the marked recovery of populations, predominantly humpbacks in this country.

Solutions included avoiding excessive slack in pot ropes, removing pots from the water when not fishing, avoiding setting pots in clusters, collecting any abandoned or lost lines or rope and checking pots regularly. Operators were encouraged to report sightings to forewarn other fishermen in the path of migrating whales.

“We came here to celebrate success, but we have to work even harder to secure that,” Edwards said.

Kaikoura’s Larncé Wichman detailed the impact on the cray fishery of the 2016 Kaikoura earthquake and destruction of inshore habitat.

Delegates got “the full sensory experience” that evening when a 6.3 quake provided a short, sharp shock.

Cathy Webb, manager of Seafood NZ’s Seafood Standards Council stressed the need for continual monitoring of biotoxins to reduce the risk of Chinese bans on the lucrative lobster trade.

It was well known that lobsters can accumulate biotoxins in their gut, although this does not affect the flesh.

Webb warned that if lobster tested at the Chinese border was found to be over regulatory limits there would likely be an immediate ban on trade, of indeterminate length.

Traceability back to the harvest area will be vital. China would demand answers and expect an investigation and response.

The two-day biennial conference was opened by National’s Clutha-Southland MP Hamish Walker, a former deckhand on a crab boat out of Dunedin and tuna fisher on the West Coast where he was known by the skipper as “the useless, hairy-arsed schoolboy”.

The rock lobster conference followed the annual Seafood NZ conference, also held in Queenstown this year, with about 300 delegates at each.

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## Identification project continues to grow

Every couple of weeks, samples of unfamiliar marine animals and specimens are collected, boxed up and sent out to NIWA's Invertebrate Collection (NIC) staff, then distributed to experts for identification.

Funded by Fisheries New Zealand and NIWA, the project is progressively creating identification guides that help experts to better identify specimens, especially in remote areas.

NIC manager Sadie Mills said the guides have helped staff to become much more proficient at what they do.

"Every report we are finding new species and new records of species in different locations. It is really exciting each time we receive a fresh lot of samples," she said.

"These are opportunistic samples gathered during fisheries research surveys and commercial fishing activities but without them we wouldn't know as much about the benthic diversity in our region."

This year's fishing trawl surveys delivered 583 new ocean species samples, including one standout – a worm with no eyes.

Examined by NIWA marine biologist Dr Geoff Read, the worm was found last year, burrowed into a piece of sunken wood North East of the Chatham's group, at a depth of 900m.

Read said it was likely a new species of Thermiphone scale worm belonging to the uncommon deep-water Iphionidae family. The species has thick scales divided into polygons, no eyes, is associated with hydrothermal vents and consumes microorganisms and bacteria.

Only 13 species of the worm are known globally.

"The continued discovery of undescribed taxa in observer and research trawl material being returned is a testament to the ability of vessel staff to identify unusual organisms and the value of this material for our ongoing discovery of New Zealand deep sea fauna," Mills said.

The worm is one of several species recorded as new to the region and will be catalogued in NIWA's Wellington-based Invertebrate Collection, containing more than 300,000 samples of coral, sponges, crustacea, anemones and amphipods.



The new species from the Thermiphone genus, identified from one of NIWA's fishery trawl surveys last year.

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## Sustainability a star in Ōra King entries

There were a record number of entries into this year's Ōra King Awards.

Entrants were challenged to draw inspiration from the theme 'Sustain' and to communicate their own sustainability and creativity through their Ōra dish.

New Zealand King Salmon's marketing manager foodservice Anne-Marie Friis said this year's calibre demonstrated the extent to which chefs connected with the theme.

"Sustainability is crucial to everything we do at Ōra King and indeed is central to the whole food industry.

"We had chefs using overlooked ingredients that often go to waste and there was a strong theme around collaborating with other local producers and the inclusion of native ingredients. We were delighted to see several entrants using Ōra King from nose to tail in their dishes and in very interesting and creative ways."

Some entries made reference to the sustainable attitudes of their restaurant teams and others used childhood memories that inspired them to look after the environment for future generations.

Antony Page, Chetan Pangam, Makoto Tokuyama, Mark Diu, Mark McAllister and Phil Clark were named as the six semi-finalists.

New Zealand chef Geoff Scott and restaurant critic Lauraine Jacobs will now visit each semi-finalist to hear about the inspiration behind the dish.

Three finalists will be announced on September 16.

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## 2019 Seafood Stars Awards winners

Congratulations to the Seafood Stars Awards winners, presented at the Seafood NZ conference in Queenstown last week:

### Young Achiever Award

- Sam Hayes, *FV Kawhia* skipper, Moana New Zealand
- Matt Howden, *FV Hakuwai* skipper, Gisborne Fisheries
- Josh Pearce, The Fish Shoppe South Melbourne director
- Sam Pearson, Acting Charge Hand, New Zealand King Salmon

### Future Development Innovation Award

- Denver McGregor, New Zealand King Salmon quality and compliance manager
- Simon Thomas, Omega Innovations Ltd. divisional manager

### Longstanding Service Award

- Brian Skepper, Sydney Fish Market general manager
- Wayne Lowther, General manager client services, FishServe

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## News

The Minister for Regional Economic Development has accused urban liberals of trying to take the fishing industry down, *TVNZ* reported. Shane Jones was speaking to the annual meeting of Seafood New Zealand in Queenstown on Friday, where he said attacks on the fishing industry came from people who did not always understand what was at stake, and the industry had to fight back to protect itself. Jones said it was not just the fishing industry that was threatened, Māori who had invested much of their economic heritage in the business were threatened too. "Those of us such as me as a Māori, who have our legacy interests via the treaty in the fishing industry, need to gird our loins and protect ourselves. Rest assured, there is a largely metropolitan-based power culture, which seeks to do damage to our industry." He went on to insist that the fishing industry had nothing to be ashamed of. "We are a legitimate, we are a legacy, we are a profitable and internationally-reputable economic force, and let no one take that away from us." Jones' comments came

in the wake of a series of attacks on the fishing industry by environmental lobbyists. Seafood New Zealand executive chair Craig Ellison also hit back at that criticism during the conference, saying that property rights were under attack from people who used social media to make emotional points. "The conversation appears to have moved into the land of rhetoric, ideology, trolling and unsubstantiated opinion," he said. "We respond with answers based on facts, science and deep evidence. But while we aim for the head, our opponents aim for the heart."

Northland residents have called for increased monitoring of mussel spat on Northland's Ninety Mile Beach to ensure regulations are adhered to, *NZ Herald* reported. Ahipara resident Rawhiti Waiti's Facebook video showed eight loaders scooping up seaweed with mussel spat attached and 10 trucks and trailers waiting on the beach. Waiti said while there had been ongoing concern raised by locals over commercial fishing and spat gathering for years along Ninety Mile Beach, capturing the activity on camera had given people an insight. "It was definitely a surprise to see it on that scale and when I spoke to one of the guys there, he said there could be up to 15 loaders in the water at once." Waiti was also concerned about the damage the vehicles could cause to tuatua and toheroa beds. Head of Fisheries New Zealand Dan Bolger said the issue at hand was contentious, but the operators involved in the activity are licensed commercial fishers operating under the Quota Management System and their activities were not illegal. He added that fisheries officers were monitoring the spat collection to ensure they were being taken lawfully.

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