



# THE UPDATE

## Captain's Blog



### **Seafood industry grateful for its essential workers**

Two weeks in and two weeks to go, given the best possible circumstances.

This is my first week as chief executive of Seafood New Zealand and it has been a challenging time for us all.

Mostly, I just want to acknowledge those of you out there doing the right thing, for New Zealand, our economy and the industry.

We know it is tough.

Being an 'essential' business is a privilege, when you contemplate all of the businesses that are not sure they will survive this pandemic, but we know it comes with some concern for those of you still going to work each day.

The Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) has hundreds of their people on the road assessing how well primary industries like ours are doing at keeping people and product safe. The feedback is we are doing very well.

Whether you are a CEO, a crew member, an office worker or a factory worker we owe you a debt of gratitude. We recognise the sacrifices you make to continue to do your job.

Sure, there are still major challenges. Air freight, cold storage, PPE and recovering markets are just some of them.

Some of you have been forced to tie up. Some to stay home. Some to lay off crew.

At a 'Wellington' level, it is not going unnoticed. Our politicians understand that without the primary sector, the recovery from this virus would be way tougher.

Our retailers and those that supply them are doing it tough as well. We are actively discussing with government what a move to Level 3 would look like for retailers with a view to both public health and economic recovery. So far, the government's consistent message has been that public health is the primary concern; a view we endorse.

Amongst all this are the good stories. Customary fishers delivering to the needy and NIWA delivering restaurant grade kingfish to relief agencies to distribute.

Check on your mates. Look after your family.

We will get through.

*Jeremy Helson*

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## **Kingfish on the menu for Northland's community**

Northlanders have the opportunity to cook and eat restaurant-quality kingfish thanks to NIWA aquaculture park in Bream Bay.

The research facility has focussed on the commercial development of kingfish for the past year, with the goal of developing a premium kingfish product for international markets.

Approximately 200-300 kilograms of kingfish have been delivered to "top notch" restaurants and award-winning chefs throughout the country so far, but the recent covid-19 lockdown has put a temporary halt on the programme.

The centre faced either dumping the fish or finding a new market.

Bream Bay chief scientist for aquaculture and biotechnology Andrew Forsyth said his team decided the best option was to distribute the kingfish through charities.

"We had a choice to terminate the programme and dump the fish in a hole or find an alternative outlet. In a crisis where our community is hurting the best thing to do is to distribute it through registered charities," Forsyth said.

Deliveries have been made to the Salvation Army, Food Rescue, Bream Bay Community Trust and a number of churches, all while observing strict food safety and Covid-19 level 4 alert procedures.

Last week 400 kingfish were distributed, with a further 300 expected to be handed out this week. Supply is likely to last another few weeks.

Forsyth said as they were operating under a fish farming licence they could only give fish as koha to registered charities, not to individuals.

The fish weigh approximately three kilos.

"It's the most popular size in the Japanese market and it's real high end. But if anyone knows their fish, it's people in this country. We are pulling it out of restaurants and giving it to a discerning group of people in Northland," Forsyth said.

"It's nice to see the locals sampling a product we hope becomes a commercial success."

The feedback from those lucky enough to get a fresh kingfish delivery has been one of genuine thanks.

Kelly Wylie, of Bream Bay Community Trust, delivered 47 kingfish yesterday to families in need.

She said those with children home from school appreciated having something extra to feed the family.

"There's a bit of amazement and very genuine appreciation. They are telling us it's pretty tasty too."



Image; Michael Cunningham, NIWA.

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## **Ngāti Kahungunu delivering to whanau in need**

Ngāti Kahungunu iwi have implemented Kai Hau Kai, customary fishing, to provide fresh fish to local kaumātua and vulnerable families during the country's covid-19 lockdown.

The commercial fisheries arm of Ngāti Kahungunu, Takitimu Seafoods, shifted focus to those in need following the forced closure of its stores.

Te Taiwhenua o Heretaunga chairperson Mike Paku said Ngāti Kahungunu sent a trawler out that fished for customary catch.

The catch was brought back, processed over a day and a half and was due to be distributed out to the six Kahungunu Taiwhenua, he said.

The haul brought an estimated 140 bins of fish ashore for distribution. From there the team put the fish into packages for Taiwhenua staff, amongst others, to deliver to needy families around the region.

"They're made up of fish already filleted and we also have some whole fish, species like flounder, mackerel species like that," Paku said.

"You can't give out kaumātua fillets without fish heads, so some fish heads are also available and frames of course."

The initiative has been supported by hapū and the Ministry for Primary Industries.

"This will be distributed 'out' rather than our whānau coming 'in', so it's all about maintaining social distancing, making sure we don't put anybody at risk."

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## Sustainable Seas Challenge - Innovation Fund

The Sustainable Seas Challenge is calling for expressions of interest in proposals that will contribute to building a blue economy in New Zealand, with blue economy being defined as marine activities that generate economic value and contribute positively to social, cultural and ecological wellbeing.

Details on the Innovation Fund can be found on the [Sustainable Seas website](#).

Calls for Expressions of Interest for projects close at midday, 18 May 2020.

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## News

It's a cherished tradition - the Friday fish and chip run - but right now the industries that supply it are taking a battering, *Stuff* reported. Right now, it's unclear what the rules are for fish and chip shops under level-three restrictions. New Zealand produces 500 million kilograms of potatoes each year, but Potatoes New Zealand chief executive Chris Claridge said without the chip shops and restaurants, growers would have to look at cutting back planting which could hurt the industry long-term. Claridge wants the chippers to be allowed to reopen as soon as the alert level drops. The \$2 billion-a-year seafood export industry has also taken a massive hit with disruptions to international trade. Seafood NZ chief executive Jeremy Helson said demand for seafood here had dropped significantly as well. "I can't put a figure on it at this stage but it's certainly pretty significant. Obviously, a lot of wholesalers that sell direct to the public have been hit by this ... fish and chips and of course, the restaurant trade," Helson said. Lulu and her husband own Islington Fish and Chips in Christchurch. She said thankfully their rent was cheap and it was just the two of them working in the shop, so they would be able to weather the shutdown. "We're ... enjoying the time to have a rest." But she said the larger stores with more staff might not make it through. "We have a friend and he's got quite a lot [of] people [who] work for him.

"[It's] going to be very hard for him." Restaurant Association chief executive Marisa Bidois said her understanding was takeaway joints could operate under level three, adding that talks were underway with officials about what exactly the rules would be for the hospitality sector when the country moved out of alert level four. According to the Ministry for Business, Innovation and Employment, decisions about how the country will exit the lockdown has not yet been finalised.

New Zealand King Salmon has slowed some production lines to adhere to strict social distancing measures during the covid-19 lockdown, *Stuff* reported. NZKS chief executive Grant Rosewarne said the company had put "massive changes" in place, including increased use of personal protective equipment, splitting work teams, separation between shifts, and minimising interaction between team members. About 420 staff continued to work in essential roles including tending to farms and hatcheries, working in factories and keeping supermarket shelves stocked with salmon. To continue operating during lockdown, companies are required to complete the Ministry for Primary Industries' registration for safe practice document, which outlines a series of stringent measures. Some measures include maintaining a two metre distance between staff, or one metre when staff are wearing extensive PPE plus "rigorous cleaning procedures". "We've got a few situations where it was difficult to achieve the one metre social distance, and that's an absolute requirement," Rosewarne said. In such instances, they had split staff across multiple shifts, slowed production lines, or both. This resulted in a lower level of production. Other measures have included complete separation between the changeover of shift, cleaning farms and handrails before another team stepped up, and separating teams in boats to ensure that "if something went wrong", both teams wouldn't be affected. It's a big education process, but as a food production business, many of the staff were already well accustomed to strict safety measures, Rosewarne said. "We've trained our people for decades on how to prevent disease transmission. We've got a real food safety culture, that meant we're in a good place."

Thousands of American commercial fishers, many of them third- or fourth-generation, risk bankruptcy in the face of the pandemic. Kenny Melanson has managed not to furlough or lay off employees at his seafood company, but all nonessential workers have been sent home. Now it's core staff, hair-netted and suited up, spreading fat sea scallops across a mechanized belt and running them through two brine tanks and two washes and then a quick-freeze. There's a wall of pallets, hundreds of boxes labeled "fresh seafood," all of it enveloped in sheets of plastic wrap. Waiting for what's next. He runs Northern Wind in New Bedford, Mass., contracting with 74 fishing vessels and employing 125 people. In business 33 years, the company sells about 15 million pounds of scallops and about 6 million pounds of ahi tuna a year. In the absence of sales, Melanson is running 150,000 pounds of sea scallops a day through individual tunnel freezers, banking them for when the pandemic is over. But cash flow is getting tight. And he worries that when regular life resumes, a glut of scallops will mean tanking prices. [Read the full Washington Post article here.](#)



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CONTACT

**Email** [info@seafood.org.nz](mailto:info@seafood.org.nz)

**Phone** [+64 4 385 4005](tel:+6443854005)

**Physical address**

Level 6  
Eagle Technology House  
135 Victoria Street  
Wellington 6011  
New Zealand