Trawling the Cook Strait Canyon

2013 New Zealand Seafood Industry Conference
Supporting a sustainable Pacific
Three hundred delegates from New Zealand’s fishing industry came together in Auckland on 1 October for the 2013 New Zealand Seafood Industry Conference. Don Carson reports on the event, themed ‘Healthy Fish, Healthy Future’.

The 2013 Seafood Industry Conference in Auckland will be remembered as a milestone in the development of commercial fishing in New Zealand.

Undoubtedly the highlight of the one-day conference was the unveiling of a tank full of live fish which had been caught the day before by Precision Seafood Harvesting (PSH) technology.

There had been much speculation in the weeks before the Conference as to what PSH was all about. At the close of a meeting on 20 August of recreational fishers at Bucklands Beach, Sanford Chief Executive Officer Eric Barratt had responded to criticism of alleged commercial waste in the SNA1 fishery by making a big promise.

“You’ll see in about eight weeks’ time the public release of a new technology for catching fish. It replaces trawling and it doesn’t use nets in the way that currently we use trawl nets. We have this technology now in an experimental use on one of our vessels. We’ve had this technology in the water. We’ve had the fish landed into our plants. The way in which this fish come to our plants is completely different. Every fish is in pristine natural condition. This technology will change the way in which the world catches fish.”

In an embargoed media briefing the day before the Seafood Industry Conference, television network crews were given copies of dramatic images of the interior of the ‘fish in a bag’ technology, which was then shown publicly for the first time at the Conference. New Zealand media went big with the news, with television networks especially playing it prominently in their bulletins.

Since then the international news media have also carried the PSH story and will certainly be following the project as it develops in the next few years of its Primary Growth Partnership funding.

The 2013 Seafood Industry Conference covered much more than its highlight PSH launch, however. Seafood New Zealand’s Healthy Fish project was officially launched by the Minister for Primary Industries, Nathan Guy, who, instead of just posing for a photo shoot with the new Seafood New Zealand’s fish species poster at the Conference, insisted on taking the time to actually download the QR code printed on it. He told the Conference minutes later that when he went online the recipe that caught his eye was grilled snapper. He did not elaborate whether the snapper had to be recreational or commercial!

Another important announcement Minister Guy made was that the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) was about to commence work on New Zealand live seafood access into Australia. There is a range of species potentially available for live export across the Tasman, and great enthusiasm among seafood retailers to have New Zealand live imports available.

PSH is likely to expand the range of prospect species even further. Minister Guy told the Conference that MPI would be making a strong scientific case to the Australian authorities that any biosecurity issues they may have can be addressed.

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seafood industry. Although PSH has been the biggest seafood news story of the year, much of the other media reporting has concentrated on negative claims made about the industry.

To work on our reputation for the future, the work needs to start with youth. Emma Bettle and Kylie Power, from the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, gave a joint presentation of their work on informing and educating schoolchildren about the realities of the oceans, the seafood industry and the science behind it.

The two education professionals have drafted school materials to conform with modern teaching practices and technology. Topics include the ways the New Zealand seafood industry maintains its sustainability, ocean pollution, how much of the other media reporting has concentrated on negative claims made about the industry, and stayers—to look after you goners?”

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Cannon said the media storm tends to escalate from that point, with an overstated and simplistic message being responded to in equally vigorous terms, with court proceedings against the government frequently either issued or threatened. He said lobbyists and public relations agencies add fuel to the fire.

He outlined a number of his media response rules. Do not, he said, use the argument that other industries are worse than fishing. Or claim that the solution is too expensive. Or impugn the critics as driven by a need to raise funds, a charge, he said, made frequently against Greenpeace in the United States but which he called “rubbish.”

Cannon counselled the New Zealand industry to come up with solutions. They may not be the solutions the lobbyists demand, he said, but if they can be shown to be workable, then a congratulation, albeit grudging, from a known antagonist has enormous credibility.

The Chairman of Seafood New Zealand, Eric Barratt, in introducing Cannon to the Conference, told participants that a New Zealand seafood delegation had just been in discussions with most of the United States environmental organisations, in preparation, in particular, for New Zealand orange roughy entering the MSC certification process.

“It is becoming increasingly important, even obligatory, now to work through these groups,” Barratt told the Conference, “as retailers and food service companies, reflecting their consumers’ concerns, use these NGOs for advice on seafood sustainability.”

He recalled the SFP (defence of a 2009 article in The New York Times very critical of the New Zealand hoki fishery. He said criticism could be fair: “New Zealand has good science, good management and it should be at the cutting edge of fisheries management marine conservation. So it is fair for critics to press for further improvements beyond those required by global standards, such as the MSC (Marine Stewardship Council)”.

But he said that when these critics referred to the New Zealand hoki fishery as unsustainable, or impugned the integrity of the MSC’s certification of this fishery, “to do so is unfair. To do so is dishonest.”

Cannon applauded in particular the establishment of the Benthic Protection Area network throughout New Zealand’s Exclusive Economic Zone, where bottom trawling is prohibited. Such initiatives, he said, were industry led: “It does not happen elsewhere.”

He was enthusiastic as well about the transparency and consultation of the New Zealand fisheries management process. On a previous visit to New Zealand, Cannon told the Conference, he had been taken to a very long meeting in Wellington analysing a stock assessment: “I had one of the most boring days of my life… it was deadly. Everything was transparent. It was all on the table. I can tell you this was not the experience I had in Moscow”.

Cannon also made some observations on the way lobby groups use the news media. He said that a green NGO group, to get a government response that it wants, goes to the news media to put pressure on ministers.

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The breakthrough design of the harvesting system allows fishing vessels to target specific species and release non-target species unharmed.

Once on the deck, the target species are still swimming inside the liner, in perfect condition, meaning fresher fish for consumers and higher-value products for fishing companies using the technology.

Sanford, Sealord and Aotearoa Fisheries have been trialling PSH on their fishing vessels for the past six months. The Vessel Manager at Aotearoa Fisheries, Nathan Reid, says crews are excited about the condition of the fish when they are landed.

“Replacing old trawl technology is really important for the industry. We’re going to see better stock recruitment and better stock in the water—it’s better for everyone,” Reid says.

Sealord too is seeing the positive impact of the technology on its crews. The Vessel Manager for Sealord, Bill Healey, says crews were sceptical at first, but are no longer.

“When we talk to them now, when we see their reactions to the fish coming up, we know we’re on to something. I know we’re doing something unique and great when I look at the crews,” Healey says.

Sanford Chief Executive Officer and Chairman of Seafood New Zealand, Eric Barratt, who, in company with Minister for Primary Industries Nathan Guy unveiled the new technology to the industry, says the PSH programme was set up in April 2012 and will run for six years to commercialise new technology in the New Zealand fishing industry.

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“‘This is the biggest step forward for commercial fishing in 150 years. What we’ve developed in New Zealand has huge benefits for fish stocks, the environment, consumers and New Zealand’s seafood industry. In the process we’re set to change the global fishing industry for the better.”

Plant & Food Research’s Science Group Leader, Seafood, Alistair Jerrett, says the new way of harvesting wild fish is a close collaboration between his team and the industry.

“This is New Zealand science in action, and the industry partners deserve a pat on the back for bringing fishing into the 21st century,” Jerrett says.

Jerrett’s team built their own underwater cameras to see into traditional trawl nets. He says the ‘aha moment’ was asking, “Why do we have to strain these fish out, why do we have to exhaust them, why do we have to damage them during harvest? The new system changes all of that.

“One of the objectives is to make sure that any animal that reaches the surface, if we can’t select it out underwater, is delivered back to the sea unharmed.” He says this is true for bigger animals as well, such as rays, sharks and any animal that is inadvertently captured.
The head of Aotearoa Fisheries, Carl Carrington, says it is good news for sustainability by improving New Zealand’s credentials and “enhances our access to sustainability-conscious consumers, improves product taste and quality, and is good for value growth”.

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That’s echoed by Sealord Chief Executive Officer, Graham Stuart, who believes that PSH is an opportunity for New Zealand to “lead the world with another great Kiwi innovation”.

“Seeing Hoki landed from a depth of 300 metres, alive and in fantastic condition, is remarkable and will totally change how our fish are brought to market,” Stuart says.

Sanford General Manager of Operations, Greg Johansson, says the new harvesting technology is just the start. “This will lead to changes in vessel design and layout, and in the way we handle fish and get it to consumers. The opportunities are endless.

“The customers should really enjoy the story of how this fish was caught, the sustainability, and the environmental impacts of this technology versus other forms of harvesting,” Johansson says.

“This will increase the value of all New Zealand seafood products when the global markets see that we’re taking a big step forward by using a more environmentally friendly way of harvesting fish.”

In light of Emirates Team New Zealand’s protracted yet dramatic failure to retain the America’s Cup, anyone might have expected the Southern Spars’ presentation at the 2013 Seafood Industry Conference to be a disappointing anti-climax.

That was far from the case. The technology was due to the Chief Executive Officer of yacht equipment supplier Southern Spars, Richard Lott’s storytelling skills, about the extraordinary innovation demonstrated by New Zealand yacht designers in the past few decades of chasing the Auld Mug.

For instance, when the Oracle syndicate came up with the specifications for the yachts to be raced in San Francisco, it intended that the yachts would not be able to foil. The boats were meant to go through the water, but they were not to sail above it.

The Kiwi yachts would not accept this presumption, and went out to test it. This attitude took the New Zealand challenge up on foils, initially above the surface of the Hauraki Gulf, and was later copied by the other Cup challengers and Oracle.

But Lott says it was far from that easy. “It’s actually quite difficult to design a wing that works really effectively at slow speed. Wings for airplanes work at 160 miles per hour. There are amazing software programs developed to model how they work. Wings for boats work at 65 miles per hour, or less. “And there isn’t much around that actually can model that accurately, so the New Zealand team developed a huge amount of it to model the way wings work, and as a result came up with the design of wing which we subsequently built.”

Of course Lott is disappointed with the America’s Cup result, “but I believe there was a fantastic amount of innovation during the Cup and quite a number of spin-off areas that will come from it... There’s absolutely amazing stuff that has come out of it and plenty more to come out still.”

How much of this was Oracle copying it is difficult to tell. Lott suspects that Oracle used foil control, although Oracle now denies this. Oracle certainly duplicated the twisted wing the New Zealand boat was using. It had not been easy to develop. When Emirates Team New Zealand went to design a wing for its boat, it thought the answers would be in all that information about aircraft wings collected during the past century of aeronautical design.

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MAERSK COCKTAIL HOUR
AND ANZ GALA DINNER
Dr Glen Thompson, Senior Manager, International and Institutional Banking, ANZ.

New Zealand’s seafood industry has worked hard to build a worldwide reputation for producing safe and healthy products. Internationally recognised as having one of the best managed and most sustainable fisheries in the world, its challenge now is to use that leadership position to launch and role-model some industry-changing initiatives around food origination.

The collective New Zealand Inc brand resonates with both our traditional and new export markets, so much so that our seafood exports totalled $1.57 billion in 20121. As incomes rise (particularly for Asian consumers), so much so that our initiatives around food origination and role-model some industry-changing initiatives around food origination.

But although New Zealand is a leader when it comes to food reputation, it doesn’t take much to damage that perception. Recent instances of international ‘food fraud’ have sparked consumer distrust, and increased the demand for assurances of authenticity and food origin.

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Meeting this increased consumer demand with high-quality products has been key to the success of New Zealand’s seafood sector. Our customers are increasingly placing greater demands on seafood companies to prove that their products meet sustainability and environmental measures. New Zealand seafood exporters have gone to great lengths to achieve Marine Stewardship Council accreditation and increased the demand for assurances of authenticity and food origin.

One only has to look at this year’s European horsemeat scandal to gain an understanding of the widespread impacts that food fraud can have on consumers, retailers, brands and entire sectors. Any consumer uncertainty in this area will see wallets stay closed: in the month following the discovery of horsemeat, sales of frozen hamburgers fell by 43 percent2.

While the European horsemeat scandal was an isolated incident, the seafood sector in the United States has also been in the firing line. Recent reports and tests indicated high levels of ‘food mislabelling’ in the sector. The percentages of seafood shown to be incorrectly labelled in Los Angeles (55 percent), Boston (48 percent) and Miami (31 percent)3 showed cause for concern. This mislabelling included the substitution of cheaper species of fish for more expensive species, while other species that consumers had been urged to avoid due to less-than-ideal stocks were sold as ‘non-threatened’ species. Other examples of this mislabelling showed the potential for extreme consumer health impacts. For example, 94 percent of the white tuna tested was actually escolar (snake mackerel), which has a purgative effect, even when eaten in small amounts4.

Furthermore, the discovery that tilapia (a fish renowned for high mercury levels) was being sold as red snapper or halibut raised concerns for pregnant women, nursing mothers and young children, all of whom are advised to avoid fish high in mercury. Not surprisingly, these studies received widespread media coverage and served as a warning that consumers and consumer advocate groups are increasingly demanding better controls.

According to a 2008 Government Accountability Office report, America’s Food and Drug Administration (FDA) physically examined only 2 percent of imported seafood (which accounts for 86 percent of America’s fish consumption) and of that, only 0.05 percent was checked for fraud, including mislabelling, substitution and short-weighting5.

Today’s consumers are more likely to check claims rather than rely on the word of producers, and with easy access to information in our social media age, the consequences for producers that deceive the public can be swift and crippling. Yet although food fraud isn’t a new phenomenon, there must be new ideas and solutions to help combat it. Products that achieve a market premium, such as New Zealand products, are more likely to be subject to fraud. In fact, Britain estimates that New Zealand companies lose approximately $90 million a year as a result of fraudsters trading off our reputation6. Not only do New Zealand companies lose out on profit, but there is also the potential for brand damage at both company and sector-wide levels.

The globalisation of the food distribution industry has complicated supply chains, making the traceability of food much more difficult. Relying on paper trails is not enough when it comes to providing transparency along the supply chain. Instead, a move to a more forensic-based approach will be required. Some European retailers have already introduced DNA testing for meat after the horsemeat scandal and, although voluntary at this stage, there are calls for it to become mandatory in some European markets. In fact, some New Zealand companies outside the seafood sector are already using forensic techniques to protect their brands along the supply chain and provide customer assurances that the products they are buying are from New Zealand.

The New Zealand seafood sector has led the way for New Zealand Inc when it comes to providing the assurances of product quality that our customers want. In the not-too-distant future, these same customers will demand proof of the authenticity and origins of our products and it will be up to the sector to work collaboratively to provide that. This should be seen as a real opportunity to ‘add value’ to our products, differentiate ourselves from competitors, and at the same time protect our brand. Although this process will be expensive, the cost of taking no action is even higher.

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Footnotes:
1 www.seafoodnewzealand.org.nz/our-industry/key-facts/
2 www.guardian.co.uk – 26 February 2013
4 www.science.org.nz/blog/2012/09/mercury-tuna-test-tells-a-truth-
5 Consumer reports magazine, December 2011
6 www.newshub.co.nz/sundaynews/view/5461068-1/label-group-turns-horsemeat-into-food-fraud

The New Zealand seafood industry is perfectly positioned to capitalise on the international value of the New Zealand Inc brand.
Catering for the experts

Bradman Harris
Head Chef, Urban Gourmet

Catering and event company Urban Gourmet worked with Martin Bosley to execute his vision for the ANZ Gala Dinner at the 2013 New Zealand Seafood Industry Conference. The company is driven by a passion for fine food, seamless events and a superb event experience.

Creating fabulous food and using the best seasonal produce, Urban Gourmet’s talented chefs create exceptional menus with presentation to complement the theme or style of event, from conferences, award nights, fashion shows and themed parties to marquee weddings on remote islands.

This recipe has been developed by Urban Gourmet Head Chef, Bradman Harris. Harris has a wealth of experience in top restaurants including Auckland’s Cin Cin on Quay and The French Café. Originally from Australia, Harris has spent time in both Melbourne and Sydney but chose to settle in New Zealand more than five years ago. Creative flair and a passion for high-quality food inspire Harris’s amazing menu designs and dish creation.

www.urbangourmet.co.nz

Curry roasted bluenose with green-lipped mussel, saffron, celeriac and leek ragout

Ingredients
180g bluenose fillet, skin on
Salt and pepper
50ml olive oil
1 clove garlic, smashed
1 sprig thyme
1t curry powder mixed with ½tsp fine salt
100ml white wine
6 green-lipped mussels
100ml cream
Pinch saffron
2 baby leeks, sliced and blanched
50g celeriac, diced and blanched
1T sliced chives
½C spinach leaves
50ml olive oil
1t capers in brine, rinsed

Method
Preheat oven to 200°C.
Season the skin side of the bluenose lightly. Heat a pan and add olive oil (50ml) when hot. Add the fish, skin side down, until it starts to go golden around the edges. Put the pan into the heated oven for four minutes, then turn the fish, add the garlic and thyme, baste with the pan juices, then season lightly with the curry salt. Return the pan to the oven for a further three minutes, then remove and rest.

In another pot, quickly sweat the spinach in olive oil (50ml). Bring the white wine to the boil in a pot. Add the mussels, cover and steam until they open. Discard any mussels that do not open. Reduce the cooking liquor by half, then add the cream, saffron, leeks, celeriac and chives.

In the pan with the fish, add the garlic, thyme, curry powder, white wine, cream, saffron, leeks, celeriac and chives. Season lightly with the curry salt. Return the pan to the oven for a further three minutes, then remove and rest.

Bring the white wine to the boil in a pot. Add the mussels, cover and steam until they open. Discard any mussels that do not open. Reduce the cooking liquor by half, then add the cream, saffron, leeks, celeriac and chives.

To serve, place the spinach in the centre of a plate, spoon the mussel ragout over and around the spinach, and place the bluenose on top. Garnish with capers.

ALBACORE TUNA SEASON

Talley’s wish to welcome all Albacore Tuna fishermen to the South Island fishery where we operate the only complete chain of tuna receiving depots.

These buying stations are:
- Picton Ricky Muir 03-572 6100 021 714 123
- Nelson Larry Moses 03-548 0109 021 438 387
- Motueka Barry Gardiner 03-528 2813 021 527 470
- Taranaki Alf Reid 03-525 3300 0274 500 501
- Westport Kerry Patterson 03-788 7175 021 353 912
- Greymouth Roger Burgess 03-769 9070 021 229 4078
- Jackson Bay Roger Burgess 03-769 9070 021 229 4078
- All other Ports Roger Burgess 03-769 9070 021 229 4078

This season we will, as usual, offer our now legendary shore assistance to all vessel owners and crews.

- 24-hour speedy discharge
- Cleaning and sanitisation of fish holds
- A 24-hour provedoring service
- Diesel at very competitive prices
- Use of our slurry bins
- Organisation of all mechanical and electrical repairs
- Supply of the full range of tuna gear
- Metfax up-to-the-minute weather information
- NIWA sea surface temperature charts
- NIWA tuna fish forecast charts
- Speedy payment
- Free ice

We would like to buy your tuna, whether it be frozen or iced, and will unload your vessel at any of the above buying stations. We will help you gear up your vessel so if you need assistance please phone us. Should you have a vessel that needs a skipper or, be a skipper who needs a vessel, please don’t hesitate to call us. We welcome all enquiries.

Roger Burgess
Talley’s Group Ltd - PO Box 5 Motueka 7143
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