



THE UPDATE

Captain's Blog

Forging into a new food frontier

A report from KPMG recently provided a stark wake up call for food producers who believed that eventually, in some distant pandemic-free time, it would be business as usual for providing and serving customers food.

KPMG argues that COVID-19 could be the ultimate disruptor – that on multiple levels, supplying food will never be the same again.

The report; *The 'now normal' future – food and fibre in a world emerging for COVID-19* says the food and fibre sector, of which seafood is a part, has been privileged to trade through the pandemic as an essential industry but it is what happens from here on in that is critical, not just for the industry but for the economic recovery of the country.

The author, Ian Proudfoot, who has spoken twice at Seafood New Zealand conferences, says while we are facing massive disruption, we are also faced with great opportunities.

The importance of food was brought to the fore as the pandemic hit as people realised the global supply chains they had once taken for granted were broken.

Proudfoot says farmers, growers and fishers need to take their essential industry status to change what has historically been a negative narrative. That the conversation should move from being exploiters of natural resources to telling the story of food's fundamental role in society.

In much the same way as the seafood industry positioned itself through The Promise campaign, Proudfoot says all food producers should be telling the story of the science and technology, the sustainability and the career opportunities.

He says we have a never-before-seen opportunity to explain ourselves to the world.

Proudfoot cautions about presuming we will ever go back to what was deemed normal pre COVID-19.

A population that has been constantly told of the dangers of interacting with anything and everyone will take a long time for people to have the confidence to move freely again; and in the meantime, new habits are born.

Will supermarkets remove their Perspex shields? Will food workers now routinely wear gloves? Will many in the population continue to wear masks when they eventually venture into crowded spaces?

Proudfoot predicts buying food online will continue to be a preference for many who first experienced it in lockdown. He says self-service food such as delicatessens will be viewed with new suspicion, if they ever open again.

And anyone who has seen the footage of the Japanese experiment of contagion at a buffet in the past few days may never touch shared food again. Proudfoot says the restaurant trend of shared plates may also revert to individual service.

He makes an interesting observation around packaging of food and a prediction that too will change. There are two global packaging philosophies; the European, where packaging is reduced for sustainability reasons and the North Asian, where food is packaged heavily to avoid handling. The European approach, currently more popular, may well cede favour to the North Asian as food safety continues to be top of mind.

Proudfoot urges food producers to put all their efforts into an immersive online experience and cautions that digital sales platforms should not be viewed as side lines and that companies should be developing dedicated processes to maximise the opportunities.

And they should be doing it now.

Nelson fishing crew back on land after lockdown

It was an eerie moment for the Nelson-based crew of *Ocean Pioneer*, returning to a city in complete lockdown after spending the last nine weeks catching scampi on the Chatham Rise.

Skipper Blair Alderson and his crew of five deckhands and a chief engineer, departed Nelson two weeks prior to the March 26 level 4 lockdown.

New Zealand's borders were still open and the number of covid-19 cases were still in single figures.

Alderson said receiving updates of the evolving Covid-19 situation while based 200 miles out to sea had been a surreal experience.

Damage to the boat's television dome during the first trip restricted their news updates to emails from home and chatter with other boats in the vicinity.

"China wasn't too far into its lockdown when we sailed...it didn't really hit home until we started getting told by family that we were in lockdown," Alderson said.

"You miss your loved ones at the best of times but when you've got a crisis like this it's certainly in the back of your mind. But you've got a job to do so you just get on with it."

When the crew unloaded their first catch at Port Nelson during level 4, the reality hit. No one was allowed off the boat and no one could come on board.

"That's when it felt real — coming through The Cut seeing no traffic along the road and people wearing face masks."

To maintain their bubble, there were no crew changes for the next month-long trip, with everyone on board pulling double duty after a couple of days' rest.

Sealord's deep-sea vessel *Tokatu* also kept a crew-bubble during lockdown.

The vessel was expected to berth in Nelson last weekend, at which point its 48-odd crew members had spent nearly 80 days onboard together.

Skipper Stephan Fridell said while information filtered through to the vessel, the situation had been difficult to process for some on board.

"The best and safest decision was made to extend the trip which we obviously put to the crew," Fridell said.

"It was a tense last week of that trip and very hard for the crew - once one story goes around it can go into threefold and vortex into this little tube - so you've got to let the crew digest it."

Offered the choice to stay on or return to their families, 90 percent opted to stay on to do the second journey. *Tokatu* returned to Nelson twice to refuel and unload product over that time. No-one was allowed to leave the vessel.

Approximately 2000 tonnes of food product was caught for Sealord during the extended trip.

Fridell said he was proud of what the crew had achieved during a challenging period.

"I am very appreciative of these guys for having stuck with me."



Ocean Pioneer skipper Blair Alderson has just returned from nine weeks of fishing at sea during the covid-19 pandemic. Image; Braden Fastier, Nelson Mail.

***RV Tangaroa* gets set for first voyage post-covid**

NIWA's flagship research vessel, the *Tangaroa*, will sail out of Wellington Harbour on Sunday for its first scientific voyage since lockdown.

The vessel will be heading to the Campbell Plateau south of New Zealand, to complete a camera survey of the seabed.

The voyage is part of a long-term research programme that began in 2017, which aims to collect seabed data to improve scientific models and better understand the biodiversity and distribution of seabed habitats across New Zealand's Exclusive Economic Zone.

Planning for this voyage has presented challenges for NIWA vessel operations manager Greg Foothead, as he waited to hear if lockdown restrictions would be eased in time for the ship to leave.

"Not knowing until Monday whether we would transition to Level 2 has meant a lot more planning than usual, but we have now got the clarity we need and have planned how things will operate on board in accordance with the latest government guidelines."

Maintaining physical distancing measures on board will be a challenge for the 25 researchers and crew but will be made easier with staggered meal-times. Galley staff will wear PPE and serve food from the servery, rather than the usual self-service.

Scientists and crew for the voyage have also been encouraged to have a Covid-19 swab test before leaving.

The amount of science being undertaken on the voyage has also been reorganised and truncated in part, with the voyage now reduced from the original four weeks in length to three.

Voyage leader and NIWA fisheries scientist Owen Anderson said he remains confident the crew will achieve most of what was originally planned. “Operationally this is a straight-forward voyage that will use NIWA’s Deep-Towed Imaging System (DTIS) to record seabed habitats and fauna. The video and still imagery collected will then be analysed to provide more information on the distribution of these often fragile and vulnerable ecosystems.”

One of the programme’s key aims has been to generate data layers to inform an assessment of the risk from bottom trawling on seafloor habitats and animals.

“We will use the information from this survey to test existing species distribution models and update them,” Anderson said.

“We hope this will give us a better handle on where these habitats are, and the characteristics of the seafloor that drive their growth and distribution.”

Tangaroa will return to Wellington on June 7.



RV Tangaroa will make depart Wellington Harbour on Sunday for its first research voyage since the lockdown began. Image; James Stonely.

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.



News

Agriculture Minister Damien O'Connor yesterday announced \$20.2 million to help rural and fishing communities recover from COVID-19, to boost access to rural support services and community hubs.

“Rural communities have faced several recent challenges outside of COVID-19, including drought and its flow on effects. It’s important people know that they don’t have to go it alone, and that help is available.

“Funding will increase access to support, advice and mental wellbeing services to help them recover from the impacts of COVID-19. It will target support to vulnerable groups, and enable community hubs and advisors to facilitate engagement, learning and access to services. It will also enable primary sector businesses to receive financial and continuity planning advice to support their recovery.”

Mr O'Connor also announced that the Government is investing \$19.3 million in a range of initiatives that will partner and support more than 10,000 New Zealanders in primary sector jobs by rapidly retraining and absorbing workers displaced from other sectors like hospitality, tourism and aviation.

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