



THE UPDATE

Captain's Blog



Seafood industry battles on through pandemic

These are testing global times and the seafood industry is far from immune to the fall out.

The industry is feeling the very real impacts with market disruption ranging from diminishing travel options to reduced freight capacity and limitations on cold storage availability. Some may be making difficult decisions around staff and crew.

As financial markets take unprecedented hits and governments scramble to provide economic stimulus it is anything but business as usual.

This week alone, three major events on the New Zealand seafood calendar were cancelled or postponed.

Minister Stuart Nash's inaugural Sustainable Seafood Awards that were scheduled for this past Wednesday were postponed and both the Maori Fisheries Conference, scheduled for next week and the Federation of Commercial Fishermen's Conference which was set for the end of May in Dunedin, were cancelled.

Internationally, the WTO meeting on eradicating fishing subsidies, set for June in Kazakhstan and supported strongly by New Zealand, has also been cancelled. As has the Boston Seafood Show, while the seafood expo in Brussels, the largest global seafood event, has been postponed and tentatively rescheduled for June 23-25.

These are decisions not taken lightly and reflect the seriousness of the COVID-19 situation and the realisation that it will be a long time before the world returns to normal. The restrictions on international air travel and government advice about limiting large gatherings simply makes these events untenable.

While decisions around school closures or directives for employees to work from home if possible have not yet been made by the government work is already going on to make sure workplaces are preparing their staff for that eventuality.

Some believe this change will be the disruptor that triggers a whole new way of working, with video calls and other technology replacing traditional offices. The Guardian this week reported that many employees sent home by large, primarily technology companies in the UK are questioning why they ever had to come into the office in the first place.

In Seattle, hit hard by COVID-19, companies including Amazon, LinkedIn, Google and Microsoft allowed employees to work from home as early as February and last week Twitter made it compulsory for its 5000 staff to work remotely.

Proponents of a shift to remote working say the wellbeing benefits to employees of no long commutes coupled with the financial benefits to employers of not having to pay large infrastructure overheads are something to consider even in non-infectious times.

As the pandemic takes its course a reduction in domestic consumption brought on by a tourism shut down is also inevitable. As airlines and cruise lines either cease operations or reduce capacity and the cancellation of large events will also have a toll in the short term.

The financial implications of COVID-19 on New Zealand's live seafood trade, particularly rock lobster, have been well documented but the true cost of the pandemic is yet to be seen. The message should be to look after staff, many of whom will be worried about external factors such as a partner losing a job, or an elderly relative being affected.

The seafood industry is resilient, and the government has proven a willingness to support industries affected and share vital and timely information.

But there is no doubt we need to buckle in for a rough ride.

More trackers for Antipodean Albatross project

Over the next six weeks, Department of Conservation workers will be studying Antipodean Albatrosses on the remote Antipodes Island.

DOC scientists Kath Walker and Graeme Elliot will attach small GPS transmitters to the birds to track them while they forage at sea. The transmitters will help DOC and Fisheries New Zealand to better understand where the birds are flying and where they encounter fishing vessels.

The duo have been studying the albatrosses for more than two decades – helping government and relevant parties to understand the flight paths of the birds and work with fishing fleets.

“Year after year we see the same male albatrosses arriving at the colony and waiting by their nest for their dead partners to return. It’s heart-wrenching to watch,” Elliot said.

New marine conservation charity Live Ocean has partnered with Southern Seabirds Solutions Trust on the project, raising \$70,000 to pay for the trackers.

“The data provided by these satellite trackers is the first step in saving this iconic species,” said Live Ocean founder Peter Burling.

“Millions of years in evolution and they could be gone in as few as 20 years. Kath and Graeme are absolute legends and we’re looking forward to following both their journey and the albatrosses.”

The trackers will be capable of pinpointing the birds’ exact location – within a few metres and in real-time.

An app developed by DOC and FNZ displays this information and allows the birds to be monitored.

The albatrosses’ flight paths can be overlaid with the activity of individual fishing vessels, helping to identify vessels that pose the most risk of bycatch.



Antipodean Albatross. Photo; Tamzin Henderson (c)

From prawns to plastic

A seventeen year old Australian, Angelina Arora, has come up with an innovative solution to plastic waste – using prawn shells to create plastic.

The prawn-based plastic is transparent, flexible, durable and takes an average of 33 days to decompose in a landfill. It's also insoluble, inexpensive to manufacture, and unlike other biodegradable materials, can be put toward a variety of uses.

"It could be used as an agricultural mulch as it releases nitrogen into the soil, which is really beneficial for plant growth, health and immunity," Arora said.

Arora, a medical student, is testing the product to see if it could also be used for medical packaging.

"I have been experimenting with biodegradable plastics for a while, however, the initial plastics I made out of corn starch were soluble in water and were taking away a potential food source," she said.

"So, I looked at waste alternatives and tried coming up with a banana peel solution – that didn't work either in regards to solubility."

The plastic-like appearance of prawn shells inspired Arora to head to the lab and start researching.

"I'm still finalising the legal aspects like patenting for example, however I am at the stage where I have produced a final prototype and would be ready to manufacture the plastic to distribute it commercially," Arora said.

Supermarkets are now discussing use of her plastic-alternative.



News

Dr Jeremy Helson has been appointed chief executive of Seafood New Zealand. SNZ executive chairman, Craig Ellison, said Helson, current chief executive of Fisheries Inshore New Zealand, was a natural choice for the position. "Jeremy has years of experience in the seafood sector in both a government and private sector capacity. His ten years in fisheries with the Ministry for Primary Industries and his six years overseeing New Zealand's inshore fisheries are invaluable. The fisheries sector is going through much change and having such a depth of experience will be essential. We are delighted to welcome Jeremy to the role," said Ellison. Ellison also gave thanks to outgoing chief executive Tim Pankhurst, who will be retiring on April 3 after seven years in the role; a position he took up

following many years heading some of New Zealand's largest newspapers. "Tim will not be leaving the industry completely, as he will be taking over the role of editor of the Seafood New Zealand magazine."

Shark experts have growing concerns about the number of endangered juvenile great white sharks being caught in fishing lines, *TVNZ* reported. In a statement, the Department of Conservation said Northland was particularly bad, with 12 of the shark species captured since March last year around the upper North Island. Five were caught on Ninety Mile Beach, and recreational fishers using kontiki and 'torpedoes' to set longlines off beaches were responsible for at least seven of the shark fatalities recorded, DOC shark expert Clinton Duffy said. "We want fishers to understand that white sharks are protected and should be released in the water immediately. They shouldn't be hauled up the beach or dragged backwards by their tails because that will cause further injury." While it is not illegal to accidentally catch or even kill a great white shark, all fishers are required to release it immediately and report the event to DOC or a fisheries officer as soon as possible, DOC said.

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