



THE UPDATE

Captain's Blog



Seafood sector adapts to uncertain times

The seafood sector is rapidly coming to terms with life in lockdown.

The recognition as an essential service comes with the proviso that health and anti-virus precautions are paramount.

Catching and processing is proceeding on a reduced scale, with supermarkets the only approved fish retail outlets.

New Zealand's favourite takeaways – fish'n'chips – are off the menu, dampening domestic demand.

The export market is fluid, likened to “whack-a-mole” by one player, where one market might close and another open, although air freight space is problematic.

Seafood NZ staff have been working closely with officials and sending out a daily update, which has received wide appreciation.

There has been some confusion between Ministry for Primary Industries and Ministry of Health guidelines but the latter are not designed for food processing.

The relevant MPI advice that seafood companies are operating to is a two-metre distance between workers, but where that is not possible, a minimum of one-metre and staff wearing personal protective equipment is required.

Masks and gloves are not specified but are the norm.

“We need to protect our staff at work in the same way as if they were at home,” Sanford chief executive Volker Kuntzsch said.

He is delivering a video message to all Sanford staff every day with a consistent message on health and safety.

All Black Jerome Kaino, celebrity chef Annabel Langbein and Newshub journalist Amanda Gillies are among others to contribute.

All-staff email and Facebook accounts have also been set up, along with an emergency text and a take-home newsletter and poster pack that includes colouring-in for the kids.

Overseas countries are looking to shore up their seafood sectors.

The Australian Government this week delivered a \$110 million emergency relief package to protect livelihoods and businesses.

That will fund 200 flights, each carrying 40 tonnes of seafood to key markets in China, Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore and the United Arab Emirates.

The major beneficiary will be the Western Australia rock lobster industry, with \$500 million of live product now able to be sold.

The charter aircraft will back fill with medical supplies and other equipment.

The Federal Government is further assisting the seafood industry by waiving Australian Fisheries Management Authority fees and charges, totalling about \$10 million.

In this country Seafood NZ has sought relief from Ministry for Primary industries/Fisheries NZ cost recovery levies, particularly where requirements such as observers are reduced or not being delivered.

One of the safest places to avoid virus transmission is at sea, assuming no one was infected in the first place, and the Southern Ocean squid season is in full swing.

Fourteen vessels are currently operating in the 16th week of the season.

There have been 1321 tows and almost total observer coverage (99 percent). No sealion mortalities have been reported.

Skippers are being urged to be kind to observers who may suffer from "cabin fever" if having to stay aboard and do more trips than usual.

In Bluff it is Sod's Law that the weather over the past week has been gorgeous but the 12-strong oyster fleet is tied up.

Barnes Oysters head Graeme Wright said the season, which had started so promisingly, was under review and if there was sufficient demand the shareholders would look to meet it.

The sold-out Bluff oyster festival has been cancelled.

Despite the many challenges, the seafood industry is well placed to help lead the country out of the current dire situation.

With tourism and education taking such a chunk out of gdp, it is the primary sector that will rescue the economy and our wellbeing.

We need to capitalise on that.

After nearly 300 Captain's Blogs written for the weekly Update it's time to sign off.

Dr Jeremy Helson takes over as Seafood NZ chief executive from Monday.

I will keep my hand in editing the Seafood magazine and look forward to covering the many issues and advances in our vibrant industry and profiling some of its many characters.

It has been a privilege.

Tim Pankhurst

The Newsroom online site this week ran this [summary](#) of retirement from a fulltime working life in such surreal times...

The final week of my retirement - in lockdown

Tim Pankhurst, chief executive of Seafood NZ and former leading newspaper editor, retires this week after 48 years in the workforce.

[He looks back on a final week like no other.](#)



Tim Pankhurst in his element.

News

Air New Zealand flew a plane loaded with New Zealand exports to China on Monday night, after the Government stepped in to keep vital trade routes open during the coronavirus pandemic, *Stuff* reported. The plane will return laden with "essential goods and equipment", according to the Government. With commercial aviation essentially shuttered by coronavirus, there have been mounting concerns that some New Zealand exports would face difficulty leaving the country as they were often carried in the cargo holds of passenger planes. The Government bailed out the national carrier with a loan of up to \$900 million. It also announced a \$600m scheme to help other parts of the aviation sector. Transport Minister Phil Twyford said up to \$1m had been "fast-tracked" to Air New Zealand to move urgent freight to and from the country. The first flight to Shanghai loaded with "time-sensitive New Zealand exports" will also return with essential goods and equipment. "We are focusing on maintaining good stocks of all essential medicines, equipment and critical products. By supporting the aviation sector, our Government is keeping open key air channels to international markets," Twyford said. "We are stepping in to make sure our exporters can get their goods to market so they can continue to support jobs and the economy," he said. The scheme worked by providing "variable top-up funding" to airlines to ensure the movement of freight continued to be financially viable, he said. While some New Zealand exports, particularly dairy, have managed to weather the Covid-19 outbreak, others, particularly time-sensitive exports like seafood, have been hard hit. Twyford said there would be further announcements shortly about other funding arrangements to support aviation.

A Hawke's Bay seafood supplier, Takitimu Seafoods, continues to trade while waiting on a response to its essential service application, *NZ Herald* reported. The company, who no longer deliver rurally around the region, have scaled down their business to fit within the Covid-19 guidelines. Chief executive of Takitimu Seafoods Taine Randell said the business has an obligation to continue until told otherwise. "Numerous discussions were had with what we were going to do, ranging from full shutdown to business as usual," he said. "In the end, the decision was made that as an iwi-owned business supplying an 'essential' product, there was an obligation on us to continue until we get formal notification of our status." Randell added: "In light of that decision, and also given the difficulties of operating under the Covid-19 danger, we have scaled down our business to online supply to local Hawke's Bay and domestic customers, wholesale supply to mainly supermarkets and small amounts of export." The seafood supplier continues to take online seafood orders as an essential service but has reduced staff numbers. Randell said Takitimu was one of thousands to register as an essential business. "We come under a couple of categories including a primary producer and a supplier of FMCG products," he said. "As of Friday, our registration has been received and we were notified that we were one of 9000 applications." The nationwide lockdown and restrictions have caused "devastating" effects on the business, according to Randell, with the closure of both their Hastings and Napier stores. "All of our staff have been affected by the uncertainty and fear of what we are facing," he said. "In terms of employment, our staffing has been reduced by approximately 65 percent."

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