



# THE UPDATE

## Captain's Blog



## Let's talk about mental health

They're taking mental health seriously in the Australian fishing industry and in New Zealand there is political will, and money, to address the same urgent issues.

The Australian government has funded Seafood Industry Australia (SIA) \$600,000 to run a pilot programme to identify and respond to mental health issues.

The issues facing Australian fishers are the same as in New Zealand; uncertainty over access to fishing grounds, the relentless negativity and public opprobrium of the industry by its critics, the financial pressures and psychological stressors of a constantly changing political and regulatory environment.

Our people need help, and mostly won't ask for it.

SIA Interim CEO, Veronica Papacosta says research shows their commercial fishers experience twice the base-rate of psychological stress of any other sector and a full one third of all commercial fishers are under this type of stress and had not reached out for support.

In July last year, on the back of the ER/GPR rollout and the consultation on the Hector's and Maui Dolphin Threat Management Plan, the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) engaged Darren Guard of Guard Safety to provide free and independent support to fishers feeling the pain of looming livelihood losses. Guard is uniquely qualified to do so and, with strong fishing credentials, was an ideal choice to provide immediate support.

Looking to the longer term, work began on a plan to develop a similar organisation to the Rural Support Trust, an organisation that reaches out to farmers who are desperate for help through life changing events. This would be a permanent organisation of trained

volunteers who can act as a conduit to bank managers, mental health experts and counselling services – or just be there for a cup of tea and a listening ear. Fishermen talking to fishermen.

Funding for a support network was announced in this year's budget – part of a \$20 million investment in support for rural and fishing communities, and we understand several million is earmarked specifically to enable the establishment of a fisher support network.

When Rural Communities Minister Damien O'Connor made the announcement, he said that while the funding is designed to provide access to support, advice and mental wellbeing services to help them recover from the impacts of COVID-19 and other sector issues, it will also enable fishing businesses to receive financial and continuity planning advice to support their recovery.

While it's great that funding for this support network has now been made available, there has been industry frustration at a perceived lack of progress since last year as ever-increasing regulatory demands add to the stress and sometimes despair of small fishers all around New Zealand's ports and harbours.

To be fair to MPI, while the disruption of a pandemic initially slowed progress, they now appear to be working in earnest to implement a wellbeing strategy for the fishing and aquaculture sectors.

The strategy includes the establishment of the fisher support network which will ultimately be owned by the industry – the fishers and aquaculture farmers themselves – and not MPI. They have told us they intend to work closely with industry organisations as well as fishers, their families and their communities to design a network that can genuinely meet their needs at a regional level and be something the fishing community is proud of.

Exactly how they will achieve that is not yet clear, but we've had some initial discussions with MPI, and we expect to see progress on that in the coming weeks.

While, primarily, this is an inshore issue, the deepsea fleet is not immune. Our major companies are also doing good work on the challenges of being at sea for long periods, and the acceleration of those challenges during COVID-19.

There are no people more qualified to mentor our people, than our people. That MPI will fund and facilitate the means to have a support network available is laudable.

What we can't allow, is for the wheels of government to grind too slowly. Good faith cannot trump good progress.

The industry has recognised for a long time that it must evolve. And it has – and continues to do so.

Our environmental footprint lessens, our fishing methods improve, and we put substantial time and money into working to manage a shared resource. However, sometimes, the decisions made for us – that impact us – remain baffling.

Of the utmost importance, as governments come and go, is that we recognise that it is a symbiotic relationship. Our prosperity depends on maintaining a good relationship.

But, equally, the importance of the seafood industry to New Zealand – the provision of world class food, the employment, and the contribution to export-led growth post a global pandemic should not be taken for granted.

And, mostly, we should be pleased that central government recognises that their decisions have consequences. Very real, human consequences.

We look forward to seeing the speedy establishment of a fisher support network.

---

## Sanford crew arrive home after six months at sea

It was a feeling of relief for *San Aotea II* passengers and crew as the vessel pulled into port after 59 days at sea.

The Sanford longline vessel departed Timaru on June 6 with a mission of retrieving 15 commercial fishermen from the South Atlantic Ocean who became stranded when COVID-19 forced the closure of international borders.

Sanford deepwater fleet manager Darryn Shaw said the only option available at the time, to fly the crew back via the UK, was problematic due to the risk of being exposed to COVID-19 and the lengthy quarantine time.

The solution – collect the crew using the *San Aotea II* while delivering new crew to the *San Aspiring* so fishing operations could continue.

Nelson-based skipper John Bennet took charge of the journey south, travelling the vessel down the Southern Ocean and around Cape Horn to the Falkland Islands.

It was a rough “rolly old night” that first evening, said Bennet, with the crew battling significant swells and the boat “basically zig-zagging” to avoid the worst of the swells.

Bennett was subbed out by *San Aspiring* skipper Shane Cottle once the vessel arrived in Port Stanley, with Cottle in charge of bringing his crew aboard the *San Aotea II*.

“We had a big feeling of having the pressure lifted when we heard Sanford were sending a boat to get us home, instead of flying through the UK,” Cottle said.

Many of the crew fishing from *San Aspiring* had been at sea for almost six months.

“The crew are ecstatic about being home,” Cottle said.

Crewman Jesse Kroupa thanked Sanford for getting him home.

“The first thing I’m going to do is spend some time with my niece and nephew, and relax and barbecue,” he said.

The sentiment was the same from another crewman, Thoman Woolley, who said he was most looking forward to hugging his partner and three-year-old son Isaac when he returned home.

Two extra passengers also joined the *San Aspiring* crew's voyage back – honeymooners Feeonaa and Neville Clifton who were stuck on the Falklands since the first week of March.

"It's amazing to be back in New Zealand after so long away," Feeonaa said. "We just tried to enjoy the scenery. It looked amazing and I've never seen Timaru like that before, and I was thinking I was just a tourist."

Cottle said the couple were perfect sailors after a couple of days of queasiness.

*San Aotea II* arrived back in Timaru Port on Tuesday morning after a successful journey home.



*San Aotea* skipper John Bennett has remained in the South Atlantic to head the *San Aspiring*.

Image; Bejon Haswell, *Stuff*.

---

## Seafood sector celebrated at the inaugural Seafood Sustainability Awards

The inaugural NZ Seafood Sustainability Awards were held at parliament on Monday, celebrating members of the seafood industry excelling in innovation and sustainability.

The awards were hosted by Fisheries Minister Stuart Nash who said the industry has committed and positive leaders.

"I established the awards to recognise and celebrate those throughout industry, tangata whenua and communities who demonstrate outstanding dedication and innovation towards the sustainability of New Zealand's seafood sector," Nash said.

"There are a lot of innovative people doing really hard work to enhance the long-term sustainability of New Zealand's kaimoana. Some of these efforts go under the radar. These

awards acknowledge and celebrate those efforts and the people and businesses behind them.”

Richard Wells of Resourcewise was the winner of the Kaitiakitanga Award and also the Supreme Sustainability Award. He has been heavily involved in reducing the risk to protected species since 2005.

The CRA8 Lobster Industry Association took out the Operational Innovation Award for its development of fisheries and environmental management plans that have maintained high stocks abundance while maximising economic returns in the Fiordland Marine Area.

The Lee Fish Award for Market Innovation and Value-Added was won by New Zealand King Salmon. The company was recognised as being world-leading in waste minimisation, for their work on plastics and the development of their own environmental certification programme.

Nate Smith of Gravity Fishing won the Emerging Leader Award. His company fishes to order, only sells whole fish and has 100 percent traceability and transparency.

And the Minister of Fisheries Award, which recognises those who have made a continuous outstanding contribution to the sustainability of the seafood sector was won by Rosemary Hurst of NIWA.

Seafood New Zealand Chief Executive, Jeremy Helson welcomed the Awards and says he is delighted the Minister has put them on the calendar.

“There is some excellent work going on in the seafood sector both in minimising our environmental footprint and designing innovative new ways of fishing.

“It is great to see our people getting recognition for their efforts and we thank Minister Nash for making it possible.”



Winners of the 2020 NZ Seafood Sustainability Awards. From left; Paul McIntyre and Aine O'Neill of NZ King Salmon, Richard Wells of Resourcewise, Rosemary Hurst of NIWA, Malcolm Lawson of CRA8 and Nate Smith of Gravity Fishing.

## Seafood Standards Council website

A new-look [Seafood Standards Council website](#) has launched with the purpose of providing relevant and easy to access information to the seafood sector.

A members-only section contains detailed information that is only relevant to industry members. To gain access to this section, you will need to complete an application form. Once approved, login details will be provided.

Apply for access [here](#).

Seafood Standards Council communications will now also be distributed through an e-newsletter designed to keep members informed on the latest food safety and market access information.

If there are people within your organisation requiring updates on food and safety and market access information, please forward this newsletter on to them. Or, contact [Cathy.Webb@seafood.org.nz](mailto:Cathy.Webb@seafood.org.nz) to subscribe.

---

## News

Sanford has announced it is proposing to close its Tauranga fish processing plant which could result in 65 job losses. The company is working with affected staff to minimise the number who are impacted. It currently employs 77 people at the Bay of Plenty site. Sanford says the proposed decision was based on a number of factors but two were key: first, the impact of COVID-19 has meant Sanford is processing less fish caught by other companies, which has seen processing volumes for its North Island sites drop significantly. Second, the buildings at the plant do not meet new seismic strength requirements. Chief operating officer Clement Chia said even if processing volumes returned to pre-COVID levels, the seismic issues mean it is not viable to continue at the Tauranga site. “We are very sorry to have to take this path. Until very recently we had been planning a strong future for our Tauranga team. We had installed a second processing line at the end of last year, but in 2020 our fish processing arrangements were not only hit by the impact of COVID-19 but we received the results of seismic engineering reports showing that the site was not viable in the long term. We would have needed to rebuild or move out within the next few years. The pandemic has unfortunately moved up that timeline.” Sanford chief executive Volker Kuntzsch said the intention is for some operations in Tauranga to continue. “We would continue to unload seafood at the Tauranga site under the proposed arrangements and we plan to retain a number of staff in that area. We are entering a period of consultation with our team and we will not know the final configurations until that process is complete. Tauranga has been an important base of operations for Sanford and we have enjoyed being part of the community there. It is very unfortunate that circumstances have pushed us down this path.”

New Zealand's closed border is proving a challenge for businesses reliant on skilled

migrant labour. Industry leaders are calling on the Government to allow exemptions, *Stuff* reported. Paul Hufflett, director of Timaru-based Aurora Fisheries, said employers like himself faced a very serious problem in not being able to get workers into the country. Under COVID-19 related regulations introduced on June 18, a critical worker must attain a travel exemption if the person has unique experience and technical or specialist skills that are not obtainable in New Zealand. “The issue is around current critical work test requirement for travel exemptions which means basically most of the ‘active’ 350,000 (migrant) workers New Zealand depends on are effectively blocked from entry into the country. Hufflett said the company was heavily dependent on overseas workers to operate its fishing trawler. “It’s not the Government’s fault the borders are closed, but it gets really pointy in the fishing industry because ships that we send to sea for a month at a time that must have crew to operate them. No crew, no business - everyone becomes unemployed very quickly.” Within the crew of 36, only six held New Zealand passports, he said. “Our existing 36 crew would collectively have 367 years of experience. Experience is not something that can be replaced overnight. The normal cycle of things is that they have time off, and when they have time off they go home, and then they come back.” Since early June, Aurora had been trying to bring in two surimi specialists from Japan, and through patience and persistence succeeded last Friday. “These are skills we can’t get in New Zealand, so that was a happy ending.”



The closure of Sanford's fish processing plant in Tauranga could result in the loss of 65 jobs.

Image; Sanford.

---

**Check out the latest Seafood Magazines**



## 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