

MAY 2020

FISH

FISHERIES RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION NEWS



MANAGEMENT

Fee and quota support

FLEETS

After quarantine, safe at sea

MARKET OVERVIEW

Consumers reassess food priorities



Shared journey in troubled waters

INDUSTRY UPDATE

COVID-19 impacts highly variable



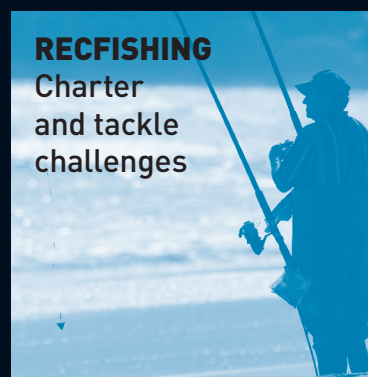
SEAFOOD RETAILERS

Sales strategies adapt



RECFISHING

Charter and tackle challenges





FISH is published by the FISHERIES RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (FRDC)

The FRDC plans, invests in and manages fisheries research, development and extension activities throughout Australia. It is a statutory authority within the portfolio of the Federal Minister for Agriculture, Drought and Emergency Management, jointly funded by the Australian Government and the fishing industry.

FRDC

Fisheries Research House,
25 Geils Court, Deakin, ACT 2600;
Locked Bag 222, Deakin West,
ACT 2600

T 02 6285 0400

E frdc@frdc.com.au

W www.frdc.com.au

To contact individual staff members see:

www.frdc.com.au/

About/FRDC-Staff

SUBSCRIPTION

FISH is available free.

To subscribe, contact the FRDC:

T 02 6285 0400

E frdc@frdc.com.au

FISH is online at www.frdc.com.au

COPYRIGHT

Information in this edition may be reproduced freely as long as it is not for commercial benefit and FRDC's FISH is acknowledged as the source.

Reproduction of the material is encouraged. Otherwise reproduction is forbidden without the written permission of the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation. Material in FISH is copyright.

DISCLAIMER

Information in FISH is not intended as professional advice. FRDC will not accept responsibility for any liability arising from reliance on the contents.

FISH is written and produced by the FRDC and Coretext Pty Ltd.

FRDC executive editor: Peter Horvat

Deputy editor: Annabel Boyer

Coretext editor: Catherine Norwood

Senior designer: Fiona James

Coretext: PO Box 12542,

Melbourne, Vic 8006

T 03 9670 1168 F 03 9670 1127

E enquiries@coretext.com.au

W www.coretext.com.au

ISSN: 1833-4784 (Print)

ISSN: 2202-7122 (Digital)

Cover photo: Jill Briggs, Affectus.

FRDC acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands on which FISH magazine is produced, and pay our respects to their Elders past and present. We acknowledge the special relationship that Indigenous Australians have with their traditional lands and waters.

FISH

WWW.FRDC.COM.AU
MAY 2020

**COVID-19
UPDATES**

Submit your ideas
and suggestions
[https://frdc.com.au/
media-publications/fish/
FISH-COVID19](https://frdc.com.au/media-publications/fish/FISH-COVID19)

FRDC FISH magazine
is available as an app.

Download from
Google Play or the
App Store.



Contents



12



17



22

3
Evolving our
responses
to crisis

4
Staying safe
during the
current crisis

6
Keeping seafood
supplies flowing

9
In brief

10
Management
moves to help
commercial
fishers

12
Fleets race to
prepare as
restrictions
tighten

14
Waiting game
suspends business
as usual

15
Research network
assesses COVID-19
impacts and
response

16
Sharing the
challenges
of uncertain
times

17
Sales strategies
adapt

20
Shopping
priorities
recalibrated

22
Dry lines for
rec fishers

While we endeavour to ensure the content published in FISH magazine is as relevant and up-to-date as possible, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the pace of change. We recognise that some regulations and restrictions we report on may change between the time the magazine leaves its production phase and when it lands in the hands of readers. Thank you for your understanding.



Evolving our crisis response

When the FRDC began developing its next research and development plan early in 2019, few could have believed the next 12 months would bring not one but two major events capable of scarring the nation's psyche: widespread, intense bushfires, followed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In developing the FRDC R&D Plan 2020–25, stakeholders identified changes they thought could happen in the world. But those engaged in the process did not foresee the emergence of a society in lockdown, traditional markets closed and extreme disruption to all aspects of commercial, Indigenous and recreational fishing and aquaculture.

While we will not completely understand the long-term consequences of either the bushfires or the pandemic for some time, Australia has survived the fires and it will survive the coronavirus too.

The impacts of the virus that causes COVID-19 are far reaching. As part of the FRDC response we have developed a shorter, more timely COVID-19 edition of *FISH*, with another out in about six weeks. Via these editions, the FRDC will provide updates and analysis of the impacts the coronavirus has had on Australia's fishing and aquaculture sectors.

For FRDC, our reason for existence is that science can make a difference. The open debate society is having on science and its importance in ensuring informed decision-making occurs,

both at a personal and government level, will hopefully strengthen the role of science in civil society.

In the face of the pandemic, we are witnessing the dynamic nature of science in real time. Continuous adaptive interpretation in the light of new evidence is the strength of the scientific process. It is also its vulnerability. There are no absolutes or guarantees.

Each country and region is an experiment. Data is collected, interpreted and used to inform the range of responses. But for each case these variables differ, making it difficult to reduce uncertainty or tease out clear reasons for different outcomes. As we collect new data, these problems are reduced; they strengthen patterns in the overarching body of evidence.

However, where human health is concerned, even at this early stage, decision-makers should be adhering to the precautionary principle when applying model assumptions and when recommending options and making decisions.

Over the past couple of months, we have been speaking with many of our stakeholders to gain an understanding of the impact of the coronavirus. We know the two biggest impacts are social and financial. We know jobs have been lost and the value of fisheries production will fall, potentially by 20 to 30 per cent.

These financial and employment losses extend across all sectors including recreational and Indigenous fisheries.

Indigenous commercial fishers are being affected in the same way as other commercial sectors. The implications for Indigenous fisheries are less well known; there may be impacts on cultural practices due to the isolation restrictions.

For the recreational sector there are significant downturns in charter and guiding operations, as well as throughout the tackle industry.

The full impact will not be known for some time. But we are seeing wonderful stories of our fishing and aquaculture community contributing back to society, whether that be by providing seafood to frontline health workers or restoring aquatic habitats affected by the summer bushfires.

Governments across Australia have responded, providing support for individuals, companies and industry sectors at levels never seen before. This, without question, has helped enormously. But the sheer scale of the impact and unknown time frames will see governments, the community, businesses and individuals continuing to evolve their responses.

The FRDC is assessing and responding to the pandemic. We have set up a page on our website for stakeholders to provide comment and feedback on issues they are facing. See <http://frdc.com.au/media-publications/fish/FISH-COVID19>.

Likewise, our staff are happy to speak with stakeholders and will continue to keep in touch to identify areas where we can help. **F**



Patrick Hone
Managing Director,
FRDC

The FRDC is assessing and responding to the pandemic. We have set up a page on our website for stakeholders to provide comment and feedback on issues they are facing. See <http://frdc.com.au/media-publications/fish/FISH-COVID19>.



Staying safe during the current crisis

Navigating the threat of coronavirus while staying physically and mentally well is the challenge we are all working to address

In the past month or so, every aspect of our lives has been changed by the spread of COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus. This is more than a cliché. Borders are shut, many of us are spending most of our time at home, and many supply chains and markets have been severely disrupted. But what does this mean for those in the seafood sector and how do the new regulations announced by state and federal governments apply?

Many seafood-sector participants are food producers and thus classified as essential services. Because of this, they can carry on producing seafood and delivering it to the Australian public.

So, for example, while public property auctions have been banned, the daily auction at Sydney Fish Market has continued, albeit with the new social distancing measures in place and with restrictions on the number of people allowed on the auction floor.

Similarly, many seafood processors, producers, retailers and takeaway food providers are able to continue operating, provided they follow the new protocols. With the ban on sit-down dining, restaurants around the country have shut their doors, although many are adapting to online and takeaway business models in an effort to see out the crisis without completely shutting down.



Physical safety

Physical distancing regulations in Australia, designed to minimise the spread of COVID-19, require a minimum of 1.5 metres between people at all times, regardless of the activity. This includes activities on fishing vessels, in food processing facilities where seafood is prepared and processed, in aquaculture facilities and in food service outlets that have continued to operate since the outbreak, such as takeaway shops. Employees who can do their jobs remotely, such as those who work in offices, are urged to work from home.

The stakes are particularly high for crew of fishing vessels heading to sea for extended periods of time. Not only is social distancing near impossible in the confined quarters of a fishing vessel, becoming ill with a highly infectious illness such as COVID-19, which can require specialised medical care, is simply not an option. For this reason the crews of fishing vessels that fish for extended periods have been quarantined for 14 days before departure.

Food safety

There is no evidence that food is a source of transmission for the virus; however, it is important that food businesses take extra care with all aspects of health and hygiene. Food Standards Australia has produced a great fact sheet on keeping surfaces and equipment clean: www.foodstandards.gov.au/foodsafety/standards/Pages/Cleaning-and-sanitising.aspx.

The World Health Organization has also issued precautionary recommendations including advice on good food handling and preparation hygiene practices. They can be found at www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public.

If someone is displaying symptoms that could potentially be attributed to COVID-19, then they should remain at home, avoid preparing food for other people and seek medical advice.



The Australian Maritime Safety Authority advises that if a vessel is unable to comply with social distancing requirements, it must seek advice from the Australian Department of Health (www.health.gov.au) as to whether it can continue to operate.

Many remote Indigenous communities are particularly vulnerable, so maintaining distance from these communities is also important. **F**



Mental health care

It is natural to feel stressed and anxious during this time of upheaval, so be kind to yourself. While social distancing is important, maintaining regular connection through channels such as telephone and video is also important. It can also help to maintain a routine and do regular exercise.

It is important at this time to stay up to date with the best information. Below is a list of resources and services.



Health assistance

The Australian Department of Health updates the 'Health alert' page every day with the latest medical advice and official reports.

See www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert.

HealthDirect is another good source of medical information on the coronavirus. See www.healthdirect.gov.au/coronavirus. For questions about testing for COVID-19 or the welfare of people with the virus, contact your state or territory health authority. The Coronavirus Health Information Line is available to call 24 hours, seven days a week for information on the coronavirus: **1800 020 080**.

The Australian Government is encouraging people to download its COVIDSafe app to speed up contacting people exposed to coronavirus. See <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/apps-and-tools/covidsafe-app>.

There are a range of services that can help with the mental health challenges the coronavirus presents:

- Lifeline Australia** – 13 11 14, www.lifeline.org.au
- Mensline** – 1300 789 978, www.mensline.org.au
- Kids Helpline** – 1800 551 80, www.kidshelpline.com.au
- Beyond Blue** – 1300 224 636, www.beyondblue.org.au
- Aussie Helpers** – 1300 665 232, <https://aussiehelpers.org.au>
- The Ripple Effect** – www.therippleeffect.com.au
- Rural Alive and Well** – www.rawtas.com.au

Other forms of assistance

Safe Work Australia has developed a range of resources to support employers and their employees during this challenging time.

See www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/covid-19-information-workplaces.

Many are experiencing financial hardship due to the pandemic. To see what services are available to you, visit Services Australia: www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/subjects/affected-coronavirus-covid-19. **F**

NATIONAL BUSINESS SUPPORT PROGRAMS

An overview of assistance available for fisheries has been compiled by the Department of Agriculture.

See <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/coronavirus/fisheries>

The International Freight Assistance Mechanism (IFAM) is offering air freight support to exporters into key overseas markets – China, Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore and the United Arab Emirates – from four departure hubs: Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Perth. See www.austrade.gov.au/news/news/international-freight-assistance-mechanism.

JobKeeper payments have been introduced to cover the costs of employees' wages. They are also available to self-employed business operators such as sole traders. Eligible businesses will receive \$1500 per employee per fortnight for up to six months. See <https://treasury.gov.au/coronavirus/businesses>.

Cash flow boosts of between \$20,000 and \$100,000 are being provided for businesses with employees. Small and medium-sized business entities with aggregated annual turnover under \$50 million that employ workers are eligible. See <https://treasury.gov.au/coronavirus/businesses>.

The **instant asset write-off** threshold has been increased from \$30,000 to \$150,000, and allows businesses to deduct 50 per cent of the cost of an eligible asset on installation. Eligible businesses are businesses with aggregated turnover below \$500 million. See https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-04/Fact_sheet_supporting_businesses_4.pdf.

Apprentice and trainee subsidies are being made available to small businesses employing fewer than 20 employees that retain an apprentice or trainee. The apprentice or trainee must have been in training with a small business as at 1 March 2020. See https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-04/fact_sheet-supporting_apprentices_and_trainees_0.pdf

Austrade is continuing to offer the **Export Market Development Grants (EMDG)** scheme to help businesses access export markets. To be eligible, businesses must have an income of not more than \$50 million in the grant year, incurred at least \$15,000 of eligible expenses under the scheme and have principal status as an export business. See www.austrade.gov.au/Australian/Export/Export-Grants.

The Rural Financial Counselling Service (RFCS) continues to be available. Rural financial counsellors provide financial advice to agriculture businesses, including fishing enterprises, and help businesses implement plans to meet the current challenges. See www.agriculture.gov.au/ag-farm-food/drought/assistance/rural-financial-counselling-service.



Keeping seafood supplies flowing

The impact of the coronavirus on demand for seafood has been highly varied, with those supplying the food service sector most severely affected

By **Ilaria Catizone**

Amid the turmoil the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to markets, businesses and people's everyday lives, the importance of the seafood sector provides some level of comfort to those working within it.

For many in Australia's fishing and aquaculture sectors, however, effects of the pandemic are severe and come on top of several other significant fishery and market disruptions: extreme summer ocean temperatures, drought and extensive bushfires. All these disruptions are expected to have a long-term impact on the profitability of fishers and seafood producers.

That being said, the impact of government restrictions to stem the spread of the coronavirus on both domestic and international markets and supply chains has so far been highly variable.

The FRDC has been mapping the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sector, both separately and in conjunction with the impact of other disruptive events. It is keen to understand how the virus affect its activities and what short-term research could assist industry and government responses.

Intelligence gathering and early discussions with stakeholders have identified impacts in the following areas.

Export demand

Of those seafood sectors that export product, 90 to 95 per cent have been affected. The high-value Rock Lobster and Abalone fisheries have been severely impacted along with other species such as Coral Trout and live eel exports. China is Australia's largest seafood buyer, but exports of Rock Lobsters halted in late January when China began progressively moving into a lockdown to arrest the spread of the virus. Lunar New Year celebrations, normally a peak period for seafood sales, were effectively cancelled and demand plummeted.

Positive signs began to emerge in April that Chinese markets were slowly reopening, although early information suggested prices would be lower than before the pandemic started.

Domestic food service

In Australia a very high proportion of domestic supply is provided to food services. The closure of restaurants due to the coronavirus restrictions has resulted in a drop in demand of around 70 to 80 per cent.

Some innovation is occurring, with restaurants moving to sell takeaway, and

fish and chip shops appear to have been less affected. A mix of imported and domestic seafood is sold into this sector.

Domestic retail sales

Retail sales of seafood remain more robust than exports and food service markets, although seafood was not a primary choice when consumers began stockpiling food supplies as coronavirus restrictions were put in place in Australia.

This may be related to perceptions that seafood does not freeze well and a lack of consumer confidence in preparing seafood at home, as identified in FRDC market research. Consumers also became more selective with what they bought and seafood took longer than other proteins to see an increase in sales.

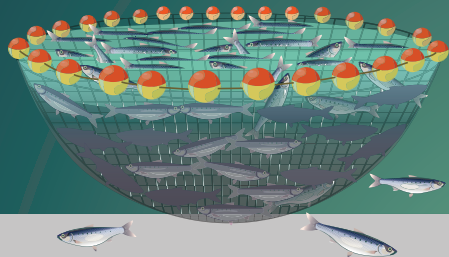
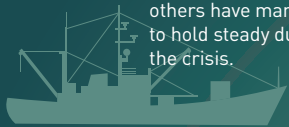
However, companies that supply major retailers, particularly supermarkets, appear to be faring well despite the market disruptions. For independent seafood retailers the story is more complex and the impacts are highly variable; some companies are struggling while others are seeing strong sales.

Campaigns to 'buy local', particularly in coastal towns currently missing tourist dollars, have helped to boost fresh →

Positive signs began to emerge in April that Chinese markets were slowly reopening, although early information suggested prices would be lower than before the pandemic started.

AQUACULTURE

Demand has plummeted for some species, while others have managed to hold steady during the crisis.



Producers continue to incur expenses – feeding livestock and maintaining operations.



EXPORTS

90 to 95 per cent of exporting seafood sectors have been affected.



Fish market



PARTNERING WITH GOVERNMENT

To support exporters the Australian Government announced \$110 million in international freight assistance for high-demand fisheries and agricultural produce.



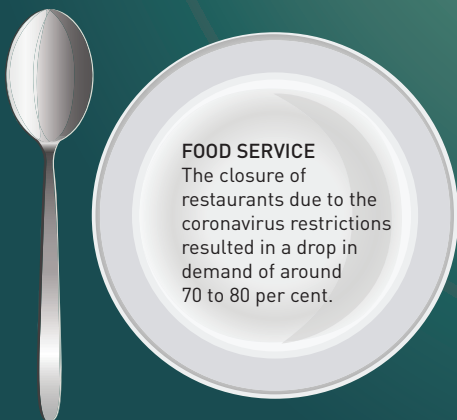
RETAIL SALES

Consumers became more selective with purchases. Seafood took longer than other proteins to see an increase in sales.



FOOD SERVICE

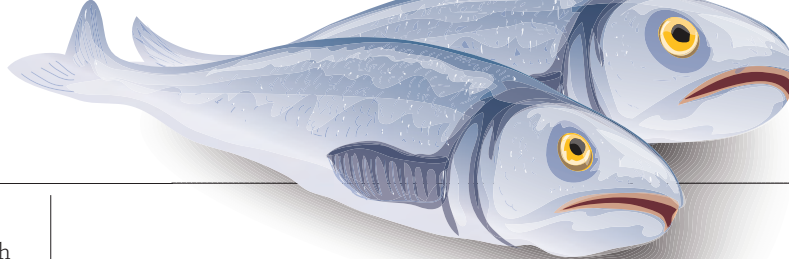
The closure of restaurants due to the coronavirus restrictions resulted in a drop in demand of around 70 to 80 per cent.



INNOVATION

Some restaurants have moved to sell takeaway. Retailers are offering home delivery and online purchase options to boost fresh fish sales.





fish sales in some areas. A number of retailers have also found success through online sales and offering home delivery.

Key consolidators such as Sydney Fish Market, Melbourne Seafood Centre and A Raptis and Sons, and major wholesalers such as Clamms and De Costi, have been critical to supply continuity.

Fishing fleets

Demand issues aside, social distancing, travel restrictions and quarantine requirements for crew have affected some fleets' ability to fish. Restocking vessels with food and other supplies has been difficult given shortages of some foods and limits on purchases to address peaks in demand and supply difficulties caused by stockpiling.

Aquaculture

In the aquaculture sector, some of its market strengths are now the same factors that are causing pressure to mount. The usual need to provide a year-round supply and to target premium food service with a quality controlled product means production systems are fully stocked. Although demand has plummeted, producers continue to incur the daily expenses of feeding livestock and maintaining operations.

The Australian Barramundi Farmers Association (ABFA) reports cash flow is the critical and immediate issue while alternative markets are sourced.

"The Barramundi sector is heavily invested in food service, which has now mostly stopped. We are working to show consumers that Barramundi freezes well and is a good alternative to meats in everyday meals, and we are seeing some increase in retail sales, but there is a significant price difference in what the producer receives," says ABFA's CEO Jo-Anne Ruscoe.

"We are working to show consumers that Barramundi freezes well and is a good alternative to meats in everyday meals. This will hopefully increase our demand outside of the food service sector."

Jo-Anne Ruscoe, CEO, ABFA

Longer-term recovery is likely to be affected by disrupted production cycles as producers are unable to, or reluctant to, stock fingerlings, coupled with large volumes of seafood needing to be harvested and no assurance of a rapid recovery in the food service sector.

Imports

Mark Boulter, executive officer of the Seafood Importers Association of Australasia, also anticipates lower orders for imported product in coming months as businesses use existing inventory.

He says importers work largely with the food service sector and, with the widespread bushfires and muted Lunar New Year celebrations, many had already been experiencing a difficult year before the coronavirus restrictions hit. This has left many sitting on larger inventories that they would have hoped to sell by now, but have not.

"There is also likely a switch away from any high price point products to more commodity products like Hoki, Basa, Hake, etc., that are retail ready – think frozen one kilogram bags aimed at the retailer's chest freezer cabinets, as this is what consumers are going to be looking for."

Partnering with government

In many cases the Australian Government has stepped in to provide a lifeline to industry. For example, in the Abalone sector, the ability to can or freeze product is helping some businesses to manage production processes and variations in demand. In Tasmania, the government has provided funding to help can product that had been held live, awaiting processing for export.

To support exporters the Australian Government has also announced \$110 million in international freight assistance for high-demand fisheries and agricultural produce. This will initially focus on the key markets of China, Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore and the UAE, with four key departure hubs: Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Perth.

In early April, Atlantic Salmon producer Tassal became the first

seafood business to partner with the Australian Government through the assistance program, beginning twice-weekly flights of product into Taiwan.

The Geraldton Fishermen's Co-operative in Western Australia reported in its recent newsletter, *The Brolos Catcher*, that on 7 April its team at Welshpool, Perth, packed the first load of rock lobsters to fly to China since the COVID-19 pandemic began in January. The delivery took advantage of a back-freight opportunity following the import of essential medical supplies.

New products

Other businesses are making new products to weather the pandemic. For example Austral Fisheries, while also affected by food service closures, has taken advantage of the fact it is a vertically integrated business and adapted its products to meet changing demand.

In partnership with its US distributors it has developed retail-ready fixed weight portions of Glacier 51 Toothfish for major retail supermarket chains in that country, such as WholeFoods. There have also been more enquiries from food service distributors seeking retail lines and smaller pack styles suited to home delivery.

Sales and marketing manager Dylan Skinns says the company is seeing significant lift in retail sales. Supermarket chains across Australia, Asia and the US are still performing well, with a threefold increase in weekly orders.

He believes the current crisis is also an opportunity for a massive reset, for industry, for supply chains and for customers. He advises businesses in the sector to "take time to think and strategise how you can do business differently". **F**

The FRDC has established a dedicated stakeholder consultation page at its website, www.frdc.com.au, to collect information that will help develop industry and government response packages.



In brief

John Williams



NEW FRDC CHAIR JOHN WILLIAMS AT THE HELM

Retired Federal National Party senator John Williams (above) was appointed to the position of FRDC chair by the Minister for Agriculture, Drought and Emergency Management, David Littleproud, on 10 March. John Williams's appointment to the role follows the resignation of previous chair Ron Boswell earlier this year due to ill health.

John Williams has had a long and varied career as a farmer, small business owner and truck driver before he was first elected to the Australian Senate in 2007. Following that term he was elected again in 2013 and 2016. He retired at the end of his term in 2019. A driving force behind the establishment of the Banking Royal Commission, John Williams has also been an advocate for country of origin labelling. John Williams presided over his first board meeting as FRDC Chair in late April 2020. **F**

SIA CEO Jane Lovell bids farewell

On 9 April, the inaugural CEO of SIA, Jane Lovell (below), announced her intention to step down from the role.

During her time as SIA CEO she has clearly demonstrated the seafood sector's need for a peak body, successfully pursuing several key issues on behalf of the sector at a national level with passion and energy. We at the FRDC wish her the very best.

SIA chairperson Veronica Papacosta will be acting as CEO until an interim CEO is appointed. She thanked Jane Lovell for her contribution to the Australian seafood industry and the organisation.

"As SIA's inaugural CEO Jane played a significant role in developing the organisation as it stands today.

"Jane served the industry tirelessly during her tenure, we thank her for her leadership and passion." **F**

More information
<https://seafoodindustryaustralia.com.au>,
chair@seafoodindustryaustralia.com.au

Jane Lovell



Postponements and cancellations

FISH normally includes a calendar of coming events of interest to our readers. In this issue, due to the coronavirus crisis, we have instead provided notifications of event cancellations and postponements.

EVENTS IN AUSTRALIA

The World Fisheries Congress (WFC), which was to be held in October 2020 in Adelaide, has been postponed until 20 to 24 September 2021. Abstracts that have been submitted for presentations are under review and still valid. The review of abstracts has been extended until the end of July 2020.

At a later date, the WFC program committee will consider a special call for abstracts concerning coronavirus-related issues the industry has faced. Another general call for abstracts may also be considered. To find out more, see <https://wfc2020.com.au>.

The International Conference and Workshop on Lobster Biology and Management 2020 that was to be held in October in Fremantle is being postponed until 2021. See www.icwl2020.com.au.

The 20th International Conference on Shellfish Restoration has been postponed tentatively until 8 to 11 December 2020. The conference will be held in Nelson Bay, NSW.

See <https://willorganise.eventsair.com/2020-international-conference-on-shellfish-restoration>.

The National Symposium on Seafood Marketing, which was planned for July, has been cancelled for the time being. See <https://queenslandseafoodmarketers.com.au/national-symposium-seafood-marketing>.

The Australia Marine Sciences Association 2020 Conference, 'Marine Science in the Anthropocene', has been cancelled. The theme and location will remain the same for the 2021 annual conference, which will be held in Sydney in July 2021. See www.amsa.asn.au/2020-sydney.

INTERNATIONAL EVENTS

The World Recreational Fishing Conference, to be held in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, has been postponed to July 2021. See www.wrfc9.com.

The 2020 United Nations World Ocean Conference in Lisbon, Portugal, has been postponed; organising countries will decide on a revised date in due course. See www.un.org/en/conferences/ocean2020.

The International Symposium on Fish Nutrition and Feeding 2020, to be held in Busan, South Korea, has been postponed from April to September. See www.isfnf2020busan.com.

The International Conference on the Biology of Fish in Montpellier, France, has been postponed to July 2021. See <https://icbf2021.com/en>.

The 20th Biennial Conference of the International Institute of Fisheries Economics and Trade, to be held in Vigo, Spain, will now take place from 31 August to 4 September 2020. See www.iifet2020.org. **F**

FRDC R&D Plan still on track

Despite the disruption being caused by the COVID-19 global pandemic, the FRDC is still on track to deliver its Research and Development Plan for 2020–2025 to the Minister for Agriculture, David Littleproud, in late June. For more information regarding the R&D Plan and its planning process, go to www.frdc.com.au/research/rde-planning-and-priorities.

Management moves to help commercial fishers

Waiving licence fees, rolling over quota and promoting local seafood are all steps being taken to support the commercial fishing sector

While decision-making is in a state of flux as the impacts of coronavirus-related restrictions become apparent, here is a guide to management actions for commercial fishing that have already been taken in Australia's fisheries jurisdictions.

This summary has been collated by members of the Australian Fisheries Management Forum – which comprises the directors of each fisheries jurisdiction – who have met on several occasions to share information and collaborate on response mechanisms.

Commonwealth

- The Australian Government has waived commercial fishing levies for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 December 2020. This is a sum of \$10 million and will reduce total levies collected for the 2019-20 financial year by two-thirds. It includes the levy component for fisheries research and development and levies for Torres Strait prawn fisheries.
- Mark Tucker has been appointed as senior agriculture industry engagement officer to coordinate liaison for the Australian Department of Agriculture. His team can be contacted at coronavirus.industry@agriculture.gov.au.

New South Wales

- The second annual instalment of all NSW commercial fishing licences has been waived. Further licence fee waivers are under consideration for the NSW commercial fishing, charter fishing and aquaculture sectors.
- NSW Department of Primary Industries has

established a COVID-19 Primary Industry Liaison Team to help NSW primary industries navigate the challenges and impacts of COVID-19. Refer to the NSW COVID-19 DPI advice webpage at www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/covid-19 or email covidinfo@dpi.nsw.gov.au.

- DPI Fisheries is working with the NSW Seafood Industry Council and the aquaculture industry to investigate possible industry support and recovery measures, including exploring digital transformation and strategic improvements to the seafood supply chain.

Queensland

To help alleviate the impacts of the pandemic on businesses, the Queensland Government is using funding through a \$3.66 million commercial fishing industry assistance package. Measures include:

- waiving quota fees for Tropical Rock Lobster and Coral Trout fisheries for the first six months of the 2019-20 season;
- waiving fishing boat licence fees for these and other fisheries affected by the coronavirus-related restrictions, such as mud crab;
- expanding the area of the Tropical Rock Lobster fishery for three months. This will reduce operating costs for quota holders and allow fishers to sell product into other markets while maintaining crew and jobs in the short term; and
- launching a local seafood promotion campaign to encourage Queenslanders to support local fishers by buying local product.

South Australia

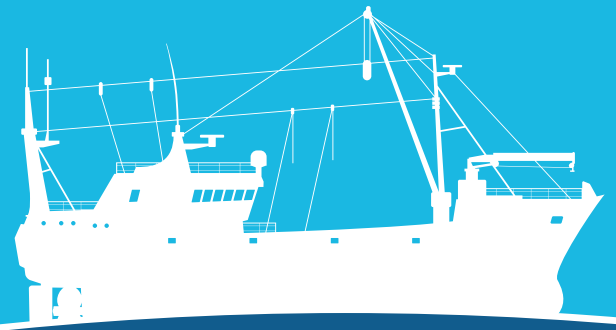
The South Australian Government will provide fee relief to the commercial seafood and charter boat sectors, which have been impacted by the coronavirus, as part of its \$1 billion economic stimulus package.

The following measures have been announced for 2020-21.

- The charter boat sector will have annual fees waived for six months.
- All other commercial fishing and aquaculture sectors will have their fees deferred for six months.
- Outstanding 2019-20 fees for all sectors will be deferred (the next round of fees will not be collected until January 2021).
- Uncaught Southern Rock Lobster quota can be carried over to the next season for Southern Zone fishers and for the next two fishing seasons for Northern Zone fishers.
- In the state's Northern Zone Inner Region, the winter closure period for Southern Rock Lobster will be lifted in 2020.
- Quota rollovers are being considered for other quota fisheries.

Tasmania

- Uncaught Southern Rock Lobster quota in the 2019-20 season has been rolled over to the 2020-21 season. The previous season ended on 1 March, but there had been a dramatic fall in demand at the end of the season as Chinese markets closed.
- Direct sales of seafood and local seafood consumption are being facilitated and promoted.



- Licence fees for Abalone divers, Southern Rock Lobster, Giant Crab and finfish fishers, as well as levies for shellfish growers will be waived for 12 months as part of a \$5.5 million seafood sector stimulus package announced by the Tasmanian Premier.
- A further \$300,000 from the Abalone industry reinvestment fund has been authorised to support Abalone processors, to help can the 36 tonnes of product that was sitting in live tanks at the time the Chinese market closed.
- The Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment is working with the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies at the University of Tasmania to track the effects of coronavirus on fisheries and to model options for alternative approaches to fisheries management as recovery begins.

Victoria

To assist commercial fishers, the state government is:

- allowing uncaught Southern Rock Lobster and Abalone quota to be rolled over into the next fishing season;
- allowing Southern Rock Lobsters held in sea cages or live-wells on boats to be returned to the sea; these will not be counted against this year's quota; and
- providing Southern Rock Lobster and Abalone fishers with alternative access options, including a hook and line permit to catch up to two tonnes of finfish.

Western Australia

Fishing and aquaculture has been recognised as an essential primary industry. This allows workers to travel into the state's Northern Designated Biosecurity Area, which includes Broome and Kununurra, subject to relevant conditions.

- All general licence and application fees for commercial fishing and fishing boats, processing and aquaculture licences will each be reduced to \$1 for the next 12 months. Individual licence holders will still need to apply for their renewals.
 - For all non-West Coast Rock Lobster managed fisheries, given the diversity of season and instalment dates, access fee payments for licence renewals that fall due before 31 December 2020 will be reduced to \$1. Instalment payments will be waived. Fees already paid will be credited to the next licensing period.
 - Consultation related to the development of a south coast marine park proposal has been put on hold to reduce stress on local communities and fishers, who are already stressed by the coronavirus crisis.
 - The Western Australian Government will help fund MSC-related reassessments and audits of the relevant fisheries when the certification process comes back on stream.
- Reduced demand for Western Rock Lobster has had a major impact on what is the state's most valuable fishery. Measures to help fishers include the following.
- The current Western Rock Lobster fishing season has been extended to 18 months, and will run from 15 January 2020 to 30 June 2021.
 - The total allowable commercial catch (TACC) for the extended season has been increased from

the previous 6300 tonnes for 12 months up to 9000 tonnes. This is less than would have been taken over this period in normal circumstances.

- The following season (2021-22) will be short to get the fishery back to the normal timing. The TACC for this will be determined later this year.
- There will be additional whale mitigation measures in place to reduce the likelihood of increased whale captures from more fishing in winter months.
- A new mechanism has been put in place to allow back-of-boat sales for Western Rock Lobsters to make it as easy as possible for licensed fishers to sell their catch locally.
- The existing seafood 'registered receiver' mechanisms are being promoted to help local businesses access more Western Rock Lobsters direct from fishers.

Northern Territory

- A series of internal borders has been created, with Designated Biosecurity Areas, under the Australian Government *Biosecurity Act*, allowing only essential service workers to access remote communities.
- Commercial fishing and fishing tour operators have sought a waiver or deferral of licence fees or levies to provide relief from cash-flow pressures.
- There has been an increase in general messaging around supporting local businesses and buying local product, including seafood.

Other support

- The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) will extend certification of all fisheries by six months. **F**

Fleets race to prepare as restrictions tighten

The early months of 2020 have provided challenges requiring quick thinking and innovation

By Brad Collis

March 2020 will be a month Austral Fisheries CEO David Carter will never forget. The race against time to assemble crews and put ships to sea as the world collapsed around him and his team – first daily, then hourly – played out like a thriller.

He says it was like the escape scene in *Tomb Raider*, where there are “giant boulders steamrolling down, everything exploding, coming apart. One stumble and game over.”

David Carter is talking about an unprecedented and dramatic sequence of events in which he and his team flew around the world and criss-crossed Australia in a desperate effort to crew, prepare and dispatch fishing boats to sea as the COVID-19 pandemic effectively shut the world down.

The challenges and quick-draw decisions were coming thick and fast as international, national and state borders closed, one after the other, trapping skippers and crews mid-journey, and, crucially, official government observers that boats must carry.

Urgent high-level talks were taking place around the clock to gain regulatory exemptions and to negotiate quarantine arrangements that would allow crews to assemble, be briefed and put to sea before harbours were closed.

On 1 April, when the Northern Prawn Fishery and the Southern Ocean Patagonian Toothfish Fishery both opened, David Carter could scarcely believe they had managed to navigate the tightening COVID-19 lockdowns and get their fleets to sea.

“We had 172 people at sea on 15 boats – three Mauritius-based longliners in the

sub-Antarctic, 11 Cairns-based prawn trawlers in the Gulf of Carpentaria, and a snapper trapping boat out of Darwin.”

As the COVID-19 pandemic started to unfold internationally, Austral’s management team had predicted some of what was to transpire. It already had its Patagonian Toothfish crews assembled at the company’s base in the island nation of Mauritius off the South African coast. The crew had been quarantined in readiness, along with three official observers, who were based in Cape Town, South Africa.

When news broke that Mauritius would close its borders on 19 March (with just one day’s notice), Austral’s support staff there were instructed to get the last plane out, even though their work was not completed. They all eventually made it to Perth (and subsequent quarantine) via Dubai.

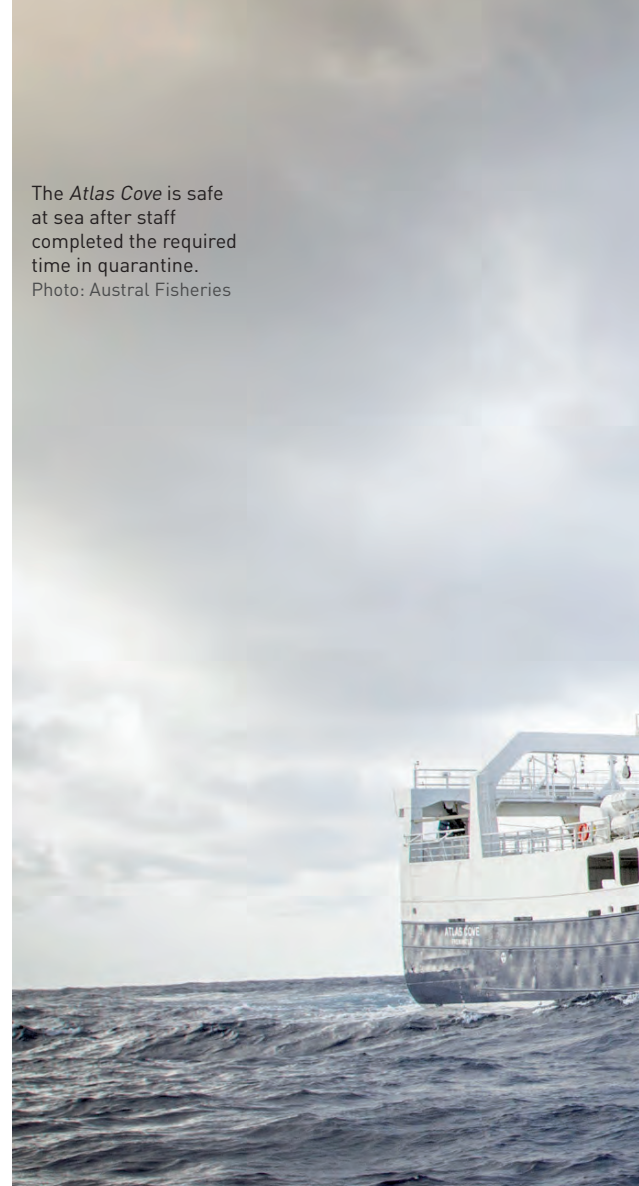
The skippers, who normally rely on the support team for provisioning and fuelling, had to finish preparing for sea themselves and get the boats out.

“Everyone had completed their quarantine so, at this point, the best place for our crew was at sea, away from exposure to the virus,” says David Carter.

For the next five days the fleet sailed in limbo as talks were held between Austral Fisheries and the relevant authorities to find a solution to allow vessels to continue operating in international waters and under the required regulatory observation. It was a scenario beginning to be played out in ocean fisheries all around the world.

David Carter says everyone was doing their best to help, and a sense of Team Australia prevailed during debates about the pros and cons

The *Atlas Cove* is safe at sea after staff completed the required time in quarantine.
Photo: Austral Fisheries



“Everyone had completed their quarantine so, at this point, the best place for our crew was at sea, away from exposure to the virus.”

David Carter, CEO, Austral Fisheries



of different options for continuing to operate under changing conditions internationally.

“We received a lot of government assistance to help get through the maze of complex regulations and requirements until we were, finally, in a position to begin fishing.”

David Carter and his management team then flew to Cairns, “where things were also starting to get sticky”.

The company was preparing 11 prawn trawlers for the start of the northern prawn season. After a risk assessment submitted to, and approved by, the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA), it was able to fast-track crew inductions.

“Along with the rest of the seafood industry we were given an exemption for some induction activities which would otherwise have exposed people to working in groups,” David Carter explains.

“As is normal practice now for new crew, we used a tablet-based ‘learning management system’ for shipboard safety inductions, as opposed to the past practice of cramming 80 people into a room. Similarly all the sign-ons and briefings were done boat by boat, again to reduce mingling.”

By the end of that week all the boats were able

to sail and everyone held their breath for 14 days. If anyone on any boat showed any COVID-19 symptoms the company’s risk management plan dictated that boat had to return to port and to quarantine.

New challenges arise

As the last prawn boat was ready to sail, word came through that WA would be closing its borders on 5 April, so David Carter and his team had to hurriedly find flights to return to Perth, arriving home with just hours to spare.

The WA Government had made it clear that anyone missing the deadline would be locked out; that, under the Australian Constitution, state residents had to be treated the same as non-residents.

Back in WA, everyone for a brief moment thought most of their problems were now solved ... until word came through that the Carpentaria Shire in northern Queensland was closing its borders.

The shire includes the coastal township of Karumba, where the prawn boats offload their catches. The shire’s concern was that

backpackers and the out-of-region workforce that supports the prawn industry might increase the infection risk to Indigenous communities.

The Cairns management team moved into overdrive to recruit a workforce and medically check everyone to ensure they were COVID-19 free.

The Carpentaria Shire accepted a proposal to charter a plane to fly in workers and transport them directly to the company compound, with no one permitted to leave except the one person nominated to shop for groceries.

“Then we had the problem of the boat crews by then having been at sea and therefore in quarantine for longer than the unloading crews in the compound. So, until the shore workers had been isolated for 14 days, the first boat crews to come in had to unload themselves to maintain social distancing.

“It was pretty tough on people and it was a relief all-round when by the second week in April we were able to say, OK everyone has now been isolated for over 14 days, you can mingle, but still only inside our sealed-off compound.”

After a few weeks of comparative calm, →



Austral Fisheries management is now working on ways to manage the mid-season break when the toothfish boats normally return to port in Mauritius, which is still closed. One option is for the boats to sail instead to Albany in WA to unload.

“But having gone through what we did to get the fleets operating, everything now is just practicalities to be managed.”

Market impacts

On the markets front, David Carter says China is slowly reopening, but in the US buyers are still holding considerable stock because of the slump in consumption.

“We estimate at least a 30 per cent price fall in the US seafood market. This may, of course, be offset by the weaker Australian dollar, cheaper fuel and government assistance programs such as waiving of levies and export incentives.

“So the next decision is whether we follow the market, or take a gamble and put product into storage. And on top of COVID-19, the prawn season isn’t looking that good anyway. The catches this year are down.”

David Carter says the experience has led to considerable management analysis by the company, one component of which has been to ‘recalibrate’ its approach to risk and to balance it against other imperatives.

“While others may later sit in judgement of the decisions we had to make under pressure, I believe it behoves us to acknowledge risk, manage it, and carry on,” he says.

“We were very mindful, from the moment this episode began, of our obligations to so many people to keep going; to maintain a safe environment for our crews who earn their living fishing; and the supply chain businesses that are also relying on us to deliver product, not to mention the broader issue of keeping available to everybody a supply of marine protein.”

He says the other ‘take-home’ from all this is how everyone pulled together.

“It has been quite humbling, from the boat crews to the front-line operations staff who put their own health and wellbeing on the line; escaping from Mauritius, going into quarantine, and the guys in Cairns where isolation was not always possible, but they did what had to be done to help.

“Add to that the support we have been given from the Australian Government through its agencies including Australian Fisheries Management Authority, AMSA, the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, and the Australian Antarctic Division ... I get goosebumps when I try to take it all in.” **F**



Australian Longline’s *Antarctic Chieftain* has been caught in port at Mauritius without its full crew. Photo: Australian Longline

Waiting game suspends business as usual

Tied to the wharf in Port Louis, Mauritius, is the *Antarctic Chieftain*, one of two Patagonian Toothfish longliners operated by Hobart-based Australian Longline. On board are 16 crew members who, at the time of *FISH* magazine going to press, had been confined to the vessel for more than six weeks, with no one allowed on or off.

Two bright notes in an otherwise challenging situation is that one of the crew is the cook and the boat had been fully provisioned for the start of the Heard Island and McDonald Islands (HIMI) fishery season. Other crew members include the chief and second engineers, factory manager and bosun.

Not with them are the New Zealand skipper, the first and second mates, and another crew member, who were all still en route to Mauritius when its borders were suddenly closed on 19 March. Mauritius has since extended its initial 15-day closure to 4 May.

Australian Longline managing director Malcolm McNeill says the crew members are in good spirits as they are accustomed to long periods aboard.

Malcolm McNeill says the company is playing a waiting game, hoping it will still be possible to resume fishing for the second half of the HIMI season.

The company’s second longliner, *Antarctic Discovery*, is at sea in the Macquarie Island Toothfish Fishery.

“The ultimate goal is to get the *Antarctic Chieftain*’s remaining crew to the boat so they

can go directly to the fishing grounds, but this would require the Mauritius airport to open and for New Zealand and Australian citizens to be allowed in,” he says.

Failing this, the company is working on a plan to get a qualified Mauritian captain and first mate to the vessel and sail it to Australia for resupply. This, however, will require Australian authorities to accept Mauritian seagoing certificates, allowing crew to arrive from New Zealand to meet the vessel and for the Mauritian crew to return to Mauritius.

“So we face several major hurdles under both scenarios, and that’s before we even know if there will be flights available.”

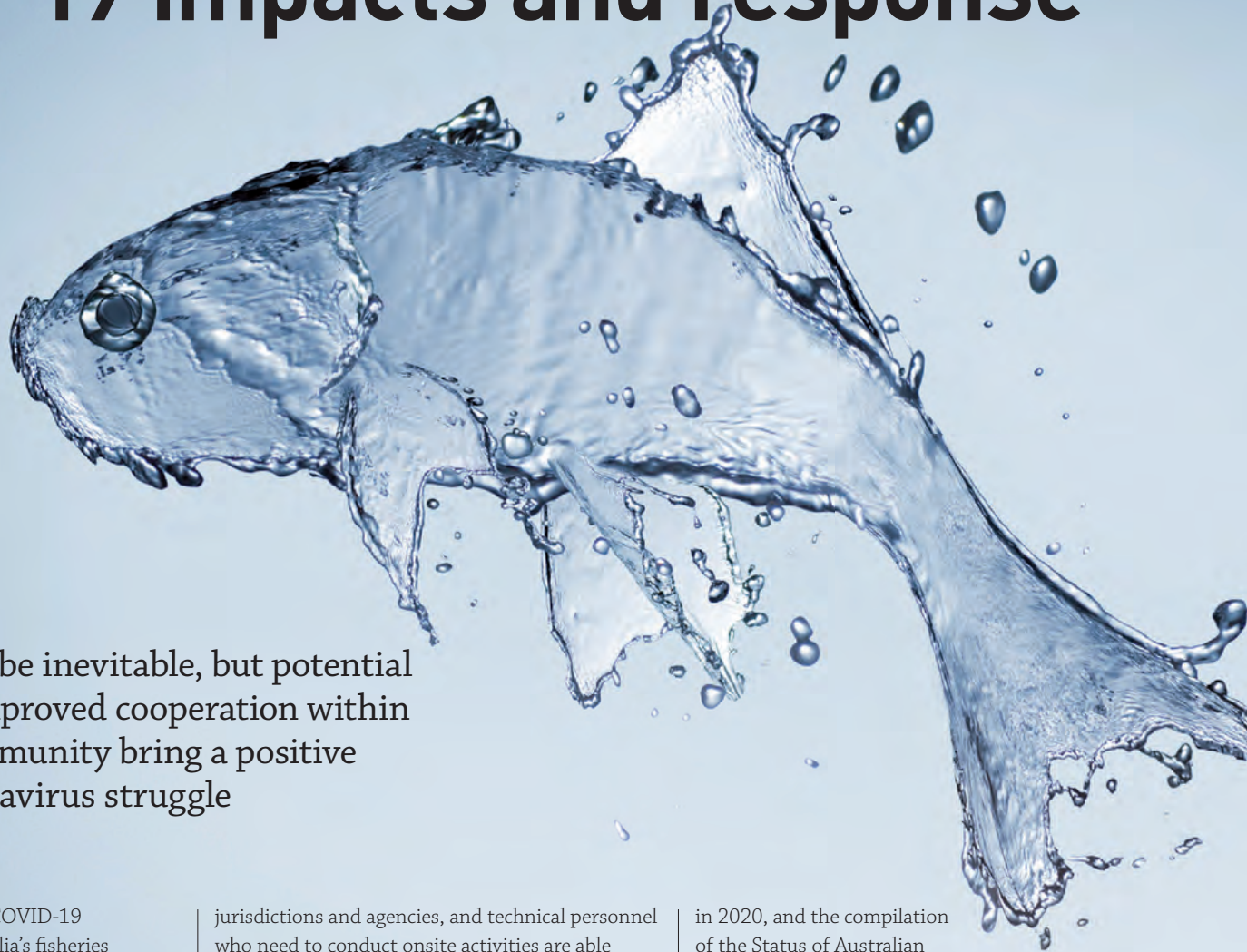
Malcolm McNeill says the company has taken a \$6 million revenue hit from missing the first half of the HIMI season. This figure will double if the boat remains stuck in port all season.

“In addition to the vessel issue we have had cancellations or significant price drops on pre-virus sales agreements. Fortunately we’ve been able to on-sell this fish again with a \$1.5 million price decrease.”

The price of Patagonian Toothfish dropped during the January–March period by US\$6 per kilogram, or about 21 per cent.

He says the company could manage the decreases, as prices would be expected to recover over time. However, having invested \$40 million in a new factory longliner vessel, due to be delivered at the end of the year, the loss of the 2020 season is a major financial blow. **F**

Research network assesses COVID-19 impacts and response



Some delays will be inevitable, but potential gains through improved cooperation within the research community bring a positive note to the coronavirus struggle

By **Toby Piddocke**

As the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on Australia's fisheries and aquaculture research emerge, agencies and institutions are doing what they can to lessen the repercussions for staff and project delivery.

The Research Providers Network (RPN) for fisheries and aquaculture met in late March and late April to discuss the implications for fisheries research, assessment and management advice in each jurisdiction under the COVID-19 restrictions. The RPN is a cross-agency, government-level committee that develops coordinated responses to fisheries research priorities.

Continuing research

As employers, research agencies such as CSIRO, governments, universities and the FRDC have implemented processes to protect staff from COVID-19 infection.

Staff are working from home in most

jurisdictions and agencies, and technical personnel who need to conduct onsite activities are able to do so in relative isolation. Meetings are being conducted via web link, and field-based data collection, where it can occur, is generally restricted to localised day trips. This will ensure staff can comply with the travel restrictions and social distancing measures that have been put in place.

Projects with intensive fieldwork components and fishery independent surveys and projects that require face-to-face collaboration and consultation are most affected by restrictions. Many have been suspended or postponed.

The impact on the delivery of stock assessments for 2020 and 2021 is likely to vary. Some are progressing as planned, such as a cross-jurisdictional stock assessment for Scalloped Hammerhead (shark), which remains on schedule. Queensland and New South Wales state fisheries agencies expect relatively few impacts to their stock assessment schedules

in 2020, and the compilation of the Status of Australian Fish Stocks 2020 is also still proceeding.

However, reduced data availability could affect the sensitivity and robustness of stock assessments, which has implications for management decisions such as setting total allowable catch (TAC) volumes. Temporary reductions to research agencies' stock assessment capacity may also be offset by reduced fishing effort in some fisheries as a result of the pandemic.

Researchers are assessing the implications on future assessments from a range of pandemic-related management measures such as rolling over quota from 2020 to 2021. They will also need to understand the impact of missing or limited data for future assessments.

Sharing resources

Sharing staff and resources at the local level offers opportunities to safely continue data →



collection, so that activities such as fieldwork could continue despite the coronavirus-related travel and physical distancing restrictions.

RPN members also discussed the potential for shared services as a way to ensure continued delivery of research services to the greatest extent possible during the pandemic. Different restrictions, procedures and guidelines across jurisdictions and agencies mean such approaches are currently limited. However, enhanced inter-agency cooperation could lead to longer-term arrangements to improve the efficiency of future research projects, according to the RPN. Implementing resource-sharing arrangements will require cross-agency coordination, and the work necessary to achieve this is underway.

FRDC response

In addition to discussions as part of the RPN, the FRDC has been contacting its contracted researchers to assess the potential impacts on its research portfolio. This has helped develop its own COVID-19 response plan, including options to extend project timelines.

Responses to date indicate widespread delays in completing projects and uncertainty about the duration of delays. Reasons for these delays include disrupted fieldwork and laboratory analyses, or the inability to conduct workshops. The delays could also have flow-on effects for fishing and aquaculture operators and fisheries managers who were waiting on research results to help with decision-making. However, researchers contacted were confident that contracted projects could be completed once restrictions on movement were lifted. **F**

The FRDC is committed to supporting its partners, including researchers, through the pandemic to ensure that Australian fishing and aquaculture is positioned for a strong recovery when the pandemic eases.

More information about this can be found on the FRDC website: <http://frdc.com.au/media-publications/fish/FISH-COVID19/FAQs-on-FRDC-Research-Projects>

Sharing the challenges of uncertain times

During this time of crisis, people around the country, including the FRDC and its networks, are coming together virtually to help each other

By Catherine Norwood

As with so many other group activities, the FRDC's National Seafood Industry Leadership Program (NSILP) is on hold for 2020, but that is not the end of the story for this year's nominated participants and program alumni.

Jill Briggs is the managing director of Affectus, which runs the NSILP program for the FRDC, and she and her team have been working to establish a support network, bringing people together to help each other through the coronavirus upheaval.

The Affectus team has been facilitating NSILP for the FRDC for 20 years and runs similar programs for other primary industries, including the wine and horticulture sectors. The alumni network across these programs is extensive.

One initiative underway is a standing invitation to all Affectus program alumni to join a virtual session for Thursday evening drinks every fortnight via Zoom – from 6.30pm to 7.30pm.

Jill Briggs says the first event on 26 March, attended by more than 30 graduates, showed how shell-shocked some people were feeling about the new restrictions and COVID-19 threat. It was hard, at that time, to even look beyond what would happen tomorrow.

"There's been a huge loss of income and market position for some businesses – not just exporters, but also those relying on high-end restaurants to buy their products – whether that's Abalone, specialty vegetables or wine. And there's not much space on the shelves to allow high-end products to simply pivot into domestic retail markets.

"It has been a brutal lesson about the complexities of supply chains for a lot of people, and not just in the seafood sector."

Jill Briggs says a few people reported accessing new markets, and others recognised they were gaining time to share with their young families.



However, there were also shared stories of the struggle to stay in business and to keep highly skilled staff when there is no work on offer.

While the number of attendees has varied over the weeks, Jill Briggs says the fortnightly sessions have provided a much-needed touchpoint.

For those who were selected to take part in the 2020 program, the Affectus team is also holding a series of Zoom gatherings until the future looks more settled.

"I also want to remind people they do have knowledge, skills and networks they can draw on to help them through this time," Jill Briggs says. To highlight this, she has published a series of leadership articles via LinkedIn and is also providing, through her company website, a dedicated 'Lockdown Leadership' space with resources, opportunities for remote social interaction and other assistance (see www.affectusaus.com.au).

"The Affectus team is committed to being as helpful as we possibly could be during this time of challenge," says Jill Briggs.

The Affectus drinks nights coming up will be on 21 May and 4 June, continuing fortnightly.

"People do have to BYO," she says. **F**

MORE INFORMATION

Jill Briggs, jill@affectusaus.com.au



Sales strategies adapt

New strategies are being adopted along the seafood supply chain to maintain sales and help customers safely access their favourite seafood during the coronavirus crisis

By Annabel Boyer



Top Customers entering the Sydney Fish Market are counted to control the number of shoppers inside. They are also required to sanitise their hands and have their temperature checked before entry. Photo: Sydney Fish Market

Above Fish and chips stores such as Hooked on Middleton Beach have implemented social distancing measures and hand-sanitising stations upon entry. Photo: Hooked on Middleton Beach

Above For day-to-day auctions at Sydney Fish Market, social distancing restrictions mean buyers now sit apart and only 55 people are permitted entry into the stand. Others traders are able to work remotely. Photo: Sydney Fish Market

At the coalface of customer service, seafood retailers and those food-service outlets that have been able to continue trading have had to adapt quickly in order to keep their doors open during the coronavirus crisis. The crisis has affected thousands of seafood businesses across the country; *FISH* spoke to just a few to gain a window into how they are adapting to the changes.

Australia’s leading seafood wholesale operator, Sydney Fish Market (SFM), has had to overhaul both its wholesale auctions and retail outlets.

“We are doing everything we can to maintain our important position within the supply chain,” says SFM’s chief executive officer Greg Dyer.

“If we are not open for business then there are significant issues around the coastline of Australia in terms of people not being able to market their product, so our focus has been to ensure complete compliance with the requests and regulations issued by authorities.”

Achieving this has meant working closely with the NSW Premier’s Office, NSW Health Department and NSW Police Force.

Changes have included reducing the number of people on the auction house floor at any one time to a maximum of 100 people, strictly enforcing social distancing and providing hand sanitisation points throughout the market.

There are overarching limits to the number of people allowed in the facility at any one time, as well as limits for each retailer, and guidelines have been developed to ensure those numbers are maintained as people move in, through and out of the market.

The day-to-day auctions in April were very different from those in February. Buyers who would normally be side by side on the buyers’ stand as they bid for the morning’s catch are now at least 1.5 metres from one another, as the social distancing rules require.

The buyers’ stand normally holds 150 people or so, but that has been reduced to just 55 buyers on any given morning.





Above
 During the busy Easter weekend, NSW Police coordinated the movement of customers in and out of Sydney Fish Market, ensuring people maintained appropriate distance from one another.
 Photo: Sydney Fish Market

The remaining buyers – about 60 or 70 of them, depending on the day – trade remotely, either from their places of business or from alternative spaces made available to them by SFM.

While the market has had the capability for remote trading for some time, SFM’s software and server capacity has needed upgrading to facilitate the much larger uptake of remote trading technology that is now occurring.

Kerry Strangas is a buyer at SFM and president of the Master Fish Merchants’ Association. “I’ve been extremely impressed by all the protocols and the action that the Sydney Fish Market management has taken,” he says.

“When you arrive you sanitise your hands, have your temperature taken and are counted. They account for everyone who is inside at all times [by using] a single entry and exit.”

He says within his own business, Poseidon’s Harvest, located in the Southgate Shopping Centre in the Sydney suburb of Sylvania, the changes have not been too onerous. This is partly because of the small size of his business:

his three or four staff are easily able to stay far enough away from one another at all times. The width of the counter keeps staff well clear of customers and, in addition, “it’s a very long counter which facilitates social distancing”.

“The main difference has been the number of times we wipe and sanitise the counter window.” Southgate Shopping Centre management has marked the floor on the customer side of the counter to indicate where people should stand.

During the Easter weekend – one of the busiest events on the calendar for seafood businesses – rope barriers were placed to ensure people queued while maintaining the required distance. Kerry Strangas says he has been surprised by how compliant and patient people have been while they wait to be served.

Easter trading

In fact, Easter presented a welcome boost to many seafood businesses, despite the significant logistical challenges involved in complying with government regulations and ensuring public



“We think it was probably the largest gathering of people that has occurred since COVID-19 began anywhere in Australia and we did it with military precision. It was nothing like what Sydney Fish Market is on a standard Easter weekend, but it worked. It went as well as I could possibly have hoped.”

Local loyalties

Anecdotal reports suggest that while many restaurants have closed, or are struggling to establish takeaway trade, existing businesses with a good reputation are doing well.

In Mackay, Queensland, Debbie Ahern, who owns and runs Debbie’s Seafood, selling mostly fresh local seafood, says this Easter has been their best ever.

“In Mackay people have really been going crazy over seafood this Easter. I think it’s about supporting local business, so we can keep our staff employed.” Because it was so busy, she even had a staff member on the door letting people in and out, so nobody else had to touch the door handles.

Adapting without tourists

On the other side of the country, in Albany, Western Australia, fish and chip shop Hooked on Middleton Beach has also been improvising.

The business was named Australia’s best fish and chip store in 2018, but Albany is a tourist town that has no tourists. This has meant Hooked on Middleton Beach has had to make several changes in order to make the most of a tough new business environment and to deal with new social distancing requirements.

“We’ve had to diversify to sell fresh fish as well, which we’ve never done before, and we are delivering to those who need it,” says owner Shane Vale. For that reason, we’ve also started to do a lot of Facebook advertising to let people know what’s in store. Like this week, the weather’s been good and we’ve got a lot of different species.” Another change is most orders are being made by phone, so that people can minimise the time they spend in the shop.



“With people who are vulnerable, they will ring ahead, and we’ll prepare their seafood and take it out to them in their car, where they can pay using one of our little mobile EFTPOS machines. We are calling it our ‘car door service’.”

Debbie Ahern, Debbie’s Seafood

safety. In order to remain open for Easter trading, SFM developed a plan to cope with the expected influx of visitors. In addition to the changes already in place, on-site parking was reduced so people could queue in the carpark, with one person per car space. NSW Police helped to coordinate the movement of customers in and out of the market, while also ensuring people maintained appropriate distance from one another.

Everyone who entered the market was temperature checked. Greg Dyer says the visibility of temperature checking, which was well publicised by the media beforehand, certainly added to consumer confidence that the market was taking people’s safety seriously.

“Principally, we wanted to make sure people felt safe and they didn’t feel like it was a free-for-all,” he says.

Ordinarily SFM sees upward of 100,000 people pass through the market on the Easter long weekend. Greg Dyer says they estimate this year there were about 50,000.

Debbie’s Seafood includes a seafood retail outlet, a café and a number of seafood trucks stationed at regular locations in Mackay. During the Easter weekend they used an extra seafood truck to increase the number of access points for customers and to help prevent any potential crowding.

As other retailers are doing, Debbie’s Seafood provides hand sanitiser for customers at their sales points and has marked the floor of the shop with crosses to show people where to stand. She says since the shutdown began, hygiene practices have been altered so surfaces such as EFTPOS machines and counter tops are more regularly wiped down. Another focus for Debbie Ahern’s team has been staff education. Information about practices such as hand washing has been distributed to staff and practices are supervised more thoroughly.

Debbie Ahern’s team has also adapted to help customers at risk. “With people who are vulnerable, they will ring ahead, and we’ll prepare their seafood and take it out to them in their car, where they can pay using one of our little mobile EFTPOS machines. We are calling it our ‘car door service,’” she says.

“We actually have a little radio that we are using to connect the person on the door to the kitchen, so we can bring orders out to customers who have already paid for their orders over the phone.”

For Easter and the increased foot traffic that came with it, Hooked on Middleton Beach set up separate entry and exit points out of the shop, and had a staff member controlling the flow of customers into the shop and ensuring they sanitised their hands before entry.

Shane Vale says business has dropped about 40 per cent with travel and physical distancing restrictions, although he is happy with the Easter trade. He says he has had to lay off staff, but has tried to minimise the impact, particularly for those who depend entirely on income from the business.

“It was a little bit scary for the first couple of weeks, when shutdowns came into place. We have a dine-in section that we’ve had to close, but we are just cruising along as best we can.” **F**



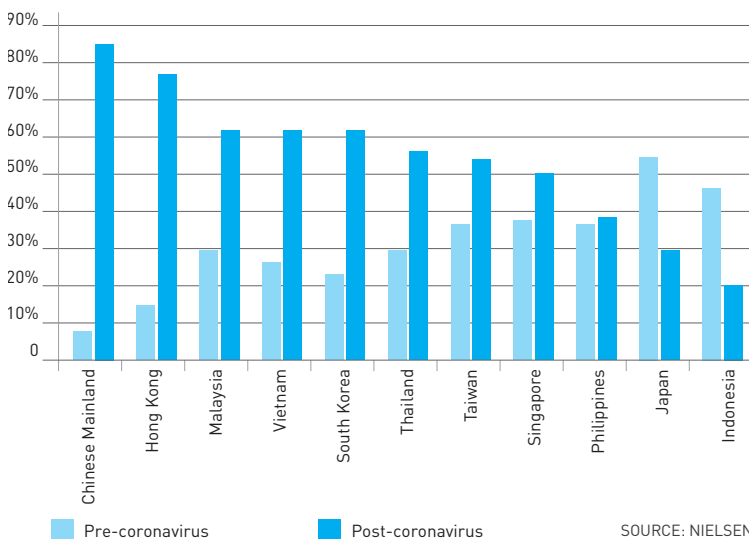
Shopping priorities recalibrated

By quantifying changes in consumer behaviour during the coronavirus crisis, researchers are helping to identify longer-term trends that will help businesses realign their marketing strategies

By Catherine Norwood



Figure 1: The likelihood of people in Asian regions changing their eating at home habits post-coronavirus



KEY POINTS

Understanding new food-buying trends is crucial for exporters to target these markets and provide the in-demand products.

Eating habits are changing around the world, and a trend towards eating at home is likely to be a permanent lifestyle change post-pandemic.

A study reveals a growing 'homebody' mindset, where health and technology will influence consumer spending and shopping habits in the short and longer term.

As feeding ourselves and our families becomes a much more considered activity in this era of physical distancing and travel restrictions market research is already putting numbers to changing food shopping and consumption patterns across Asia and Australia. Research is also looking to identify changes in the longer-term 'intentions' of consumers, post-pandemic, which could reshape supply chains more permanently.

Trends in Asia

Global market analytics firm Nielsen has evaluated markets in 11 Asian countries, several of which have experienced extended lockdowns in efforts to control outbreaks of the coronavirus disease COVID-19.

Markets studied include mainland China, Hong Kong, South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan. Other countries in the study were Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam.

Several of these countries are crucial to Australia's premium seafood exports that target the high-end food service sector. For exporters, understanding these global trends will become important in continuing to target these markets with the right product offerings.

Vaughan Ryan, managing director of Nielsen South-east Asia, says the study shows consumers in Asian countries are rethinking how they will eat post-COVID-19.

Many are indicating they will make eating at home regularly a permanent lifestyle change. Of the 11 countries in the study, only Japanese and Indonesian consumers said they were less likely to change their eating habits as a result of the global pandemic (see Figure 1).

On the Chinese mainland, 86 per cent of consumers said they would eat at home more often than before the outbreak. A similar trend was observed in other markets, with 77 per cent of consumers in Hong Kong planning



to eat at home more often than before the event. In each of South Korea, Malaysia and Vietnam, that number was 62 per cent.

The study also found a high demand for more takeaway food and home deliveries of food, particularly in Hong Kong, South Korea and Thailand. These markets epitomise ‘on-the-go’ lifestyles and value the convenience on-the-go food offerings bring.

The findings have implications for restaurants and other out-of-home businesses, and could also affect the way retailers stock their stores to meet these emerging new levels of demand.

Even when eating meals prepared by others, the data suggest more of these meals will be purchased to eat at home, to which Vaughan Ryan suggests more permanent change may be occurring.

“Consumer thinking and actions have been reoriented, and this will have long-term consequences. For many, old habits like eating out may forever be replaced by new habits, more apt to new, altered environments.

“Not only will consumers reassess where they’re eating, but they will also be far more cognisant of what they’re eating,” he says.

A separate study undertaken in mainland China as it emerges from quarantine reveals a growing ‘homebody’ mindset, where health and technology will influence consumer spending and shopping habits in the short and longer term.

Australian shopping

More detailed data collected through Nielsen Homescan in Australia shows the average

Australian household has enough essential food supplies to last the next few months as coronavirus-related restrictions and lockdown laws continue to play out.

Sarah Deas, director of Nielsen Connect, Pacific, says volume sales for long-life meals, bread mix, rice, flour and pasta more than doubled in the four weeks ending 22 March 2020, compared with the same period last year.

Based on previous years’ spending, this means the average Australian household has enough of these items in the pantry to last two to three months.

Of foods that showed the most substantial growth in demand, canned fish ranked 11th and was the only seafood product identified (see Figure 2).

“More time at home will give rise to more cooking and baking from scratch as consumers find creative ways to use up their pantry staples,” Sarah Deas says.

“There is also an increase in sales for convenient meal options that also cater to smaller-person households or those that are juggling the various demands of working from home and home-schooling.”

She says in the future, brands that focus on health and fitness are likely to see strong demand from consumers who place renewed importance on staying healthy – a trend already emerging in Chinese consumer markets.

“With more time on their hands and lots of carbs and other pantry staples to use up, we expect to see Australian households make more

of an effort to cook from scratch and attempt to make meals outside of their usual repertoire.”

Moving online

Nielsen Digital Content Ratings data shows that on the last weekend of March, Australians spent 71 per cent more time online with food and cooking content when compared with the last weekend of February.

The biggest single day for Australians visiting online cooking sites in 2020 was Sunday 29 March, with a combined total of 63,555 hours spent on these sites.

The Nielsen Homescan data also reveals Australians are getting more adventurous with their cooking ingredients, with volume sales of Asian and Indian cooking items up 126 per cent and 187 per cent, respectively.

Nielsen Homescan research is also measuring a significant increase in online grocery shopping, as many consumers look to limit their exposure to large crowds in-store.

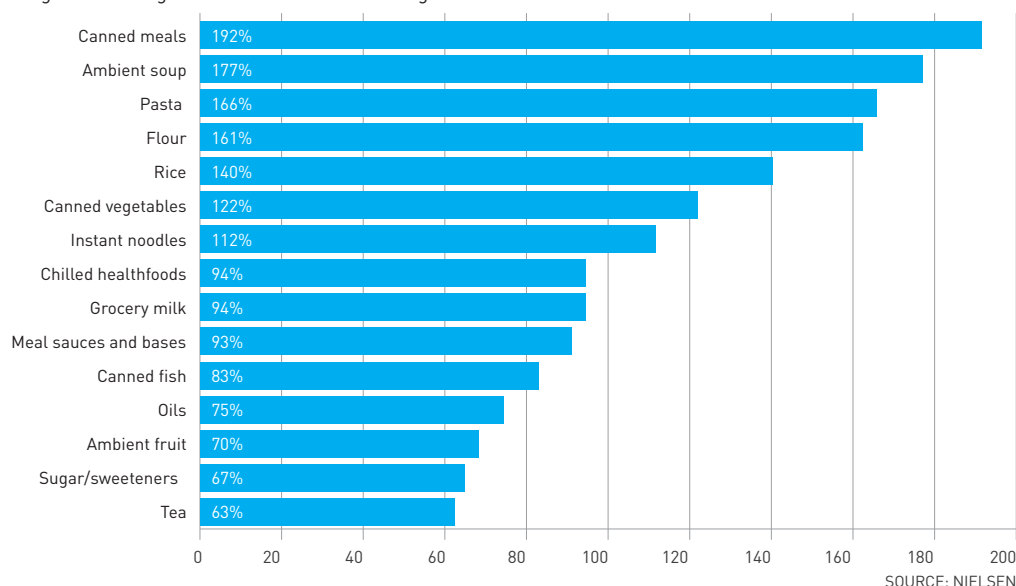
In the four weeks to 22 March 2020, Australian online grocery sales increased more than 45 per cent compared with annual online growth of 34 per cent recorded in 2019.

However, a surge in online orders in March, combined with in-store shortages of many products, led Coles and Woolworths supermarkets to suspend online ordering and deliveries, which have since resumed.

Nielsen reports the COVID-19 pandemic has spurred a new wave of growth for online grocery shopping and e-commerce, with consumers open to exploring alternative retailing options.

An effective online strategy is becoming increasingly critical for retailers and brands, and measuring the continued growth of this channel is key to understanding how it fits within shoppers’ buying patterns and overall spending repertoire. **F**

Figure 2: Sales growth of in-demand food categories in Australia for four weeks to 22 March 2020



The FRDC has commissioned market research from Nielsen to identify the impact of COVID-19 on seafood retail sales in Australia, and consumer trends that the sector may be able to take advantage of. This research will be reported in the next issue of *FISH* Magazine.

Dry lines for rec fishers

As recreational fishers navigate a world dealing with the coronavirus, they are encouraged to heed restrictions and put safety first

FOR MORE INFORMATION IN YOUR STATE, CHECK:

- South Australia <https://recfishsa.org.au>
- NSW <https://www.rfansw.com.au>
- Queensland <https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/fisheries/recreational>
- WA <https://recfishwest.org.au>
- Victoria <https://www.vrfish.com.au>
- Tasmania <https://www.tarfish.org>
- Northern Territory <https://afant.com.au>

Story and photo
Brad Collis

Like the rest of the economy, Australia's recreational fishing sector and its supporting businesses have been hit hard by the coronavirus-related restrictions on people's movements.

Victoria remains, at the time of writing, the only state or territory to have banned recreational fishing completely. However, travel restrictions and the closure of public facilities, including many boat ramps, have curtailed fishing activity more broadly.

Sector leaders say most people understand the restrictions and the much-reduced contingent of fishers has been following social distancing requirements.

The chair of the Australian Fishing Trade Association (AFTA), Bob Baldwin, says the association has maintained a dialogue with governments because it believes recreational fishing needs to be maintained, within the social distancing rules. Fishing qualifies under two of the permitted Activity Schedules

set out by the Federal Government: Schedule 1, which allows activities for gathering food, and Schedule 5, which allows people to exercise.

"So we believe people can, within the rules, cast a line and hopefully catch a feed ... except in Victoria. This probably rules out sport fishing, where fishing – rather than food – is the main objective."

In conjunction with its government-level discussions, AFTA has been running a social media campaign encouraging fishers to stay active, if possible, and to adhere strictly to social distancing rules.

The campaign features a tightly packed school of fish captioned, "Don't be like these guys, use your fishing rod as a social distancing tool" (see page 19).

Western outlook

In early April, Western Australia took the extreme step of closing its border to anyone travelling unnecessarily, following Tasmania and the Northern Territory. However, recreational fishing remains

a permitted activity there, provided people observe social distancing rules.

That said, WA has been divided into nine exclusion zones, with limited movement allowed between zones. That means, for example, that fishers living in the Perth metropolitan area cannot travel to popular fishing destinations in the state's south and north.

Andrew Rowland, chief executive officer of Recfishwest, says reduced fishing activity was particularly noticeable over Easter, which is typically a peak time for recreational fishing.

Those who did fish followed the social distancing rules. He says the ban in Victoria had helped to reinforce the message in WA, asking fishers to do the right thing.

"In fact we have seen a strong community approach. Crowded boat ramps, for example, can be places of frustration and unsettled behaviour, but now we are seeing people being patient and respectful."



DON'T BE LIKE THESE GUYS, USE YOUR FISHING ROD AS A SOCIAL DISTANCING TOOL



Abide by your local COVID-19 social distancing rules
Don't ruin it for others

2 April 2020



A GOOD WAY TO STAY ACTIVE



Abide by your local COVID-19 social distancing rules
Don't ruin it for others

2 April 2020



Above and left ATFA has been running a social media campaign encouraging fishers to stay active while adhering to social distancing.

While Recfishwest supports fishing as a crucial escape in times of heightened stress, it is also asking fishers to re-evaluate their plans in light of the coronavirus threat.

The Recfishwest website reflects this position. "Recfishwest understands people wanting to go fishing at what is a very challenging time for the benefit of their mental health and wellbeing and to get a feed for their family," it states, "[but] we advise recfishers to think very carefully if it is essential for you to go fishing and to be safe and be responsible for your own wellbeing, your family's and that of the community as a whole."

It is encouraging people to instead plan future fishing trips, which will support regional economies, and to stock up on gear in preparation, supporting local tackle suppliers.

Business impacts

In Australia, there are 60 fishing tackle manufacturers who collectively employ 300 people, 60 wholesalers employing 600, and 2000 retailers employing more than 100,000 people, according to a 2017 Productivity Commission report. These businesses supply an estimated 3.5 to 4 million recreational fishers.

AFTA president Michael Starkey says the economic impact of restrictions has been severe but varied. For east coast communities that have not even started recovering from the summer bushfires, the impact of coronavirus-related restrictions

has been devastating. Overall, he says, wholesalers have been the hardest hit. They have inventories they cannot move because retailers have stopped ordering as they run down existing stocks ahead of closing up.

AFTA surveyed its members and found significant impacts in Victoria, where recreational fishing has been banned. The survey at the end of March 2020 found 40 per cent of Victorian tackle shops had closed and 40 per cent were planning to close. The main sales activity was online purchasing.

"Fishing went from an entitlement to a privilege and it happened so quickly that it took time for people to take it in," Michael Starkey says.

In WA, Andrew Rowland says tackle traders and charter fishing operators have both been seriously affected.

"Most stores will have stocked up for Easter, and April generally when the weather is ideal [for fishing], and are now holding stock that is not shifting. And the charter industry was effectively closed overnight."

He says the charter fishing sector had a world-class reputation and there is a need to make sure this capability and expertise is not lost. "So we will be working with government to reopen this in some form as soon as restrictions can be eased.

"The sooner we can pull through this together as a community, the sooner we can all get back out there fishing," Andrew Rowland says. **F**

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Fishing provides families with food and can be greatly beneficial to people's mental health. The COVID-19 pandemic is an opportunity for fishers and boaters to show the way and do the right thing.

The Australian Fishing Trade Association says fishing is a privilege, not a right, and access can be taken away if people break the rules.

If you need to go fishing, and are permitted to, abide by the social distancing rules. Each state or even council has different restrictions, so always check and follow local guidelines.

There should be no mass gatherings at ramps and boaters should not simply be out for a day on the water.

When fishing for food, fish locally. Fishers should not travel great distances to fish; social distancing and all other coronavirus-related regulations take precedence.



This means:

- Fish only with people from your household.
- Fish only in local waters.
- Do not travel to fish – head directly to your nearest ramp.
- Fish only for food, not for fun.
- Do not delay when launching and retrieving your boat.
- Do not allow household members to play on the beach where you are fishing or in any nearby park.
- Maintain social distance at all times.
- Do not clean fish at the ramp; take them home to reduce your time outside.

SOURCE: AUSTRALIAN FISHING
TRADE ASSOCIATION



In these changing times, what **do you need** more information on?

Are there **issues you know about** that you want to communicate more widely?

The Fisheries Research and Development Corporation's (FRDC) role is to create knowledge, educate and inform. In this challenging time the FRDC wants to hear from you, to make sure we are providing the information our stakeholders in the seafood sector need.

Please get in touch and we'll do our best to answer your questions in our upcoming publications. You can email us at frdc@frdc.com.au or submit them via the frdc website:

www.frdc.com.au

