

2010 New Zealand Aquaculture Conference

By Justine Brennan, senior Planner at the Bay of Plenty Regional Council

The 2010 New Zealand Aquaculture Conference was held on the 17th and 18th of November at the Rutherford Hotel in Nelson. The conference was attended by over 250 delegates from industry, science, regional council and iwi sectors and provided an opportunity to deliver the key messages of the recent aquaculture reform.

During the course of the two-day conference delegates were left with little doubt that the National led Government is committed to unlocking the potential of New Zealand aquaculture as part of its Economic Growth Agenda, and is actively supporting the industry to triple current annual sales and reach its target of \$1 billion exports by 2025.

Mike Burrell, CEO of Aquaculture New Zealand opened the conference by introducing the theme 'futures now', which was expanded upon over the two days to cover the future of aquaculture in New Zealand in terms of:

- Future law and planning
- Future science
- Future markets
- Future Māori participation

Future law and planning

The conference provided a timely opportunity for industry and local government to come to grips with the details of the Aquaculture Legislation Amendment Bill (No 3), which had its first reading in the House the day before the conference. The reforms were introduced by the Minister of Fisheries, Phil Heatley, who under the new regime becomes the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

Wayne McNee, departing CEO of the Ministry of Fisheries, assisted by Dan Lees, director of the Government's new Aquaculture Unit, led us through the details of the Aquaculture Bill. The Bill reforms four substantial pieces of legislation (the Resource Management Act 1991, Fisheries Act 1986, Māori Commercial Aquaculture Claims Settlement Act 2004, and the Aquaculture Reform (Repeals and Transitional Provisions) Act 2004), with the intention being to stimulate growth and promote investment certainty. These intentions are to be achieved through streamlining planning and consenting processes, and removing impediments to gaining water space.

The main legislative changes proposed by the Bill include;

- Removing the requirement that aquaculture activities can only take place within Aquaculture Management Areas (AMAs)
- Streamlining the Undue Adverse Effects (UAE) test on fisheries
- Introducing a minimum 20 year consent term for aquaculture

- Limiting the information requirements for re-consenting an existing marine farm
- Introducing tools to enable councils to better manage situations of high demand for water space

Lincoln University's Hamish Rennie invited delegates to think outside the square in terms of future opportunities for aquaculture planning. The removal of AMAs, the advent of open-ocean farming and associated infrastructure requirements, demand for space within the coastal marine area, and the enormous potential of ocean ranching will require 'blue ocean' thinking from coastal planners in order to provide opportunities for aquaculture in appropriate locations.

Future science

Kevin Heasman of the Cawthron Institute spoke on the future of open-ocean farming around the world. Kevin's presentation highlighted that farming offshore is considerably more expensive than sheltered coastal water, due to higher servicing and equipment costs and greater loss of product. However the benefits are also higher in terms of greater phytoplankton levels, cleaner water, faster growth rates and superior product. The take-home message regarding the future of offshore marine farms was their enormous potential to satisfy increasing global demand for protein, tempered by the reality that success will ultimately depend on a number of external factors such as technological advances and a supportive economic environment for exports.

Chris Cornelisen, marine scientist from the Cawthron Institute, delivered a high impact presentation on meeting the future environmental challenges of a growing aquaculture industry. The importance of integrated management across the invisible jurisdictional boundary of land / ocean was highlighted using the infamous 'dead zones' of the Gulf of Mexico as an alarming case study. The take-home message was the importance of industry participation in the land management planning process to ensure the preservation of pristine water quality, which is a keystone in terms of marketing New Zealand seafood.

Future markets

Jason Shoebridge, Managing Director of marketing company TNS Conversa, delivered some good news for aquaculture in terms of consumer trends. Future demand for protein is increasing exponentially with global population growth and it is unlikely that wild-caught seafood will be able to meet that demand sustainably. Aquaculture is projected to make up 58% of worldwide seafood production by 2020.

Future consumer trends reflect a shift away from the 'indul-

gence' customer towards 'ethical' consumption (consumption with a conscience). This trend provides an opportunity for the New Zealand seafood industry to leverage off the benefits of product grown in New Zealand waters, including environmental sustainability, social responsibility, authenticity and traceability.

A. J. Hu, Partner and co-founder of The JLJ Group, a consultancy firm specialising in assisting New Zealand companies to enter the thriving but challenging Chinese market, presented some mind boggling stats on the world's fastest growing economy. Last year China consumed over 21 million tonnes of seafood and overtook Japan as the second largest economy in the world. Most seafood consumption (and foreign investment) is targeted in coastal cities which are predicted to grow by 20% per year over the next 20 years.

New Zealand is well placed to leverage off this growth, as China's domestic seafood production is low-value and the country relies on imports to satisfy demand for high-value products. In addition, New Zealand seafood has established a good reputation in China and the potential for export growth is unlimited, particularly if we can tap into western-type hotels and restaurants which play a key role in changing consumer perception and consumption trends.

Future Iwi participation

While the aquaculture reforms do not alter the core components of the 2004 Māori commercial aquaculture settlement (in terms of 20% of new aquaculture space created after 1 January 2005 being provided to iwi aquaculture organisations), a new delivery mechanism will be needed as space will no longer be created through AMAs. There are a number of challenges in allocating a percentage of new space in the absence of large AMAs, particularly when much of the new space likely to be consented will take the form of small extensions to existing farms.

During the breakout sessions on Māori in aquaculture, the high profile panel of Matiu Rei, Justine Inns, Keir Volkering and Laws Lawson led robust discussion centred around the Bill's provision for settlement to be reached by providing either space or an agreed equivalent. Ministry of Fisheries officials indicated that a lack of consensus among iwi will not impede the progress of the reforms as Government have indicated a willingness to return to these negotiations once the primary reforms have progressed.

The 2010 New Zealand Aquaculture Conference provided a valuable opportunity to network and gain up-to-the minute insights on the changing landscape that is aquaculture legislation in New Zealand. My personal highlight was the cocktail function held at the World of Wearable Art and Classic Cars Museum, where delegates got a taste of the Logan Brown experience with head chef and Regal Salmon ambassador Shaun Clouston dishing up his signature smoked salmon. I can still taste it! For me that evening served as a reminder to everyone involved in aquaculture planning in New Zealand that we have something very special to offer the world, so let's hope the Aquaculture Legislation Amendment Bill (No 3) finally gets it right.