



## Northern Prawn Fishery seeks accreditation

The Northern Prawn Fishery (NPF), which extends from Cape York in Far North Queensland to Cape Londonderry in northern Western Australia, is enjoying its best Banana Prawn season in a generation.

The bumper season is the silver lining to Cyclone Yasi and the Queensland floods: with so much rain, Banana Prawns are now cheaper than the fruit that shares their name. The fishery will be building on its success over the next 12 months in an attempt to become the first tropical prawn fishery in the world to gain accreditation from the prestigious Marine Stewardship Council (MSC).

Annie Jarrett is CEO of NPF Industry Pty Ltd, which represents about 95 per cent of Northern Prawn Fishery operators. She says accreditation represents an exciting opportunity for the fishery.

"The Northern Prawn Fishery has been recognised by the United Nations and many others as a global model for sustainable fisheries management," Annie Jarrett says.

"The NPF has been putting sustainable fisheries practices in for some time. It was the first fishery in the world to develop a bycatch action plan, which has been continually developed since its introduction in 1997."

According to a case study published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, the NPF is one of the first major fisheries in the world to fully embrace both economic efficiency

and environmental sustainability in an operational management system underpinned by scientific research.

With Woolworths and Coles implementing sustainable seafood policies, David Carter, NPF Industry member and CEO of Austral Fisheries, which operates nine trawlers in the fishery, says the announcement just "screamed opportunity" for the northern prawn industry – and for the Australian fish business in general.

"We were quick to get Woolworths' support behind MSC certification," David Carter says. Woolworths has contributed \$25,000 to the cost and will help the industry move through the 12-month accreditation process.

"Most importantly, they are helping us to tell our story to their customers and consumers in a way that we haven't had the resources to do. So it's a win-win-win situation: they get to add value to a good Aussie product they can differentiate from their competitors, we get the benefits of MSC certification – globally recognised and blue tick – and the consumer gets to enjoy seafood guilt-free."

The choice to use MSC is an indication of the industry's faith in the classification system.

"We consider MSC to be the gold standard of environmental certification programs," Annie Jarrett says. "There are others out there but they're not as globally recognised or well received.

Having a global standard is important to us because we export quite a lot of our product, so of course we're hoping there will be some increase in prices and consumer demand."

David Carter says he is confident MSC certification will further improve the fishery's culture of sustainability. "Having the certification process moving through the business helps the crews to better understand all the rules and regulations they have. And I would hope it will give everyone some pride in being part of something that's pretty special."

Certification is an intensive process that requires the fishery and others to provide a high level of information. A team of three experts will work in detail through a long list of criteria, consulting with stakeholders, developing performance indicators and developing a peer review process. The fishery will need to meet and stay at agreed performance levels before it will be certified.

David Carter says the main challenge will be in gathering all the necessary information. "If there is not enough, the fishery won't pass, so getting this part right is really important. But given our long commitment to sustainability and the quality of our scientific and management support, we're confident we'll move through the process fairly smoothly."

- LYNDA DELACEY