



Queensland Crayfish Farmers Association Inc.

QCFA

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NORTHERN AUSTRALIA DEVELOPMENT – REDCLAW INDUSTRY PARTICIPATION

INTRODUCTION:

Before getting to the heart of this subject, it is important that the reader has some appreciation of the history and current status of the redclaw industry in Queensland.

HISTORY:

Redclaw crayfish farming is a very new industry, the animal being identified as an ideal subject for aquaculture in 1990. This was followed by a large uptake from people acquiring redclaw farming licences, the majority of whom were attracted by the novelty and how it was promoted as a hobby. Many of these ‘farmers’ fell by the wayside thru lack of commitment and planning. This, together with unrealistic expectations, ensured their failure and in doing so, gave the industry the reputation of being unviable. Those who approached the industry in a businesslike fashion are still there and have been farming successfully for many years.

CURRENT STATUS:

Over the last 8 years, the industry has taken responsibility for itself. A research program in partnership with the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) and James Cook University (JCU) was initiated. Currently our third project is in progress. All projects have the common objective of enhancing the production and profitability of the industry. On the back of the successful research effort, the industry has made a positive effort to promote itself as good place to be for a commercial operation. This effort has included conferences, regional workshops, introduction of a research levy and establishment of a progressive industry website. The book “Redclaw Farming – Getting Started” has been produced and published. Sales of this book are gaining momentum. The results are starting to be seen as new and prospective serious farmers are joining industry Associations.

NORTH AUSTRALIAN POSSIBILITIES:

Redclaw is a tropical native animal. Whilst it can be grown in more temperate climates, it thrives in Northern Australia. The other great attraction is how it complements other traditional agriculture pursuits. A secondary use for water drained from the redclaw ponds can serve a multiple purpose, as it is ideal for crop irrigation.

Redclaw farming has a small environmental footprint. This has been enhanced recently by research resulting in better farming methods, efficient use of feed and water and improved animal handling techniques. It is important to note that redclaw, being a freshwater species does not necessarily have to be farmed on the coastal fringe, avoiding environmentally sensitive areas. Redclaw are currently being farmed very successfully in western areas utilising water from the artesian basin.

Nutritional requirements are simple and feed materials can be sourced from land based renewable resources which can be located adjacent to any development. This situation adds value to the aquaculture development

While the heart of the existing redclaw industry is Queensland, the Northern Territory has a slightly genetically dissimilar species native to that area. There are no viable farms at the moment in NT, but all the parameters are present and there is no reason a redclaw industry would not be successful in NT and WA, especially by benefiting from the research and experience gained in Queensland.

Expansion of the existing Queensland industry and development of an industry in Northern Territory and northern Western Australia would make a significant contribution to growing the economy Northern Australia.

High end restaurants comprise the majority of the local market. Market opportunities currently outstrip supply, in spite of zero marketing effort ever been made by the industry. There are still literally millions of Australians who have never heard of redclaw crayfish. Regular enquiries have to be declined because farmers presently cannot keep up with demand. The overseas market is untapped. Northern Australia is the door to an immense Asian marketplace with redclaw being an absolutely ideal product for high end Asian restaurants – a virtual insatiable customer base.

HOW QCFA CAN CONTRIBUTE:

Recent ground breaking developments can be refined and the results made available. The QCFA website is an ideal tool for encouraging new entrants to the industry. Expansion of existing farms in Queensland utilising these developments, using successful Queensland farms as an example, and promoting the industry in the other states will achieve this. The results of continuing research effort will further enhance the attractiveness of the industry, which, because of its young age, has enormous potential to capitalise on recent and future research and development projects.

The redclaw industry is comprised of people with vision. This provides the impetus for past, current and envisaged research projects. In the last few years we have bred a faster growing strain of redclaw, rewritten the book on the concept of farming methods utilising a hatchery, and now have an advanced feed formulation. Current projects are focusing on improved survival.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE:

Demonstrate the potential and viability of large scale farms. While the industry currently is small, comprising family sized operations, there is enormous potential for development of large scale farms. A Business Consulting firm in Cairns has been approached to

rewrite an outdated Scoping Analysis for a major scale redclaw farm and include a realistic financial model. At this time other projects have first priority on our limited funds and this study is unable to proceed. Funding is required to complete, publish and promote this publication.

Identify suitable areas of land for aquaculture. The land need not be fertile, but needs good compaction and water holding capabilities. Topography of the land should be considered, ideally with a 1:100 slope

Water supply is of foremost importance. The supply can be from a dam, river or bores. The quality of water needs to be of suitable purity for aquaculture and be available 365 days a year. A minimum of three megalitres of water per hectare of ponds is required. Much of this water can be reused for agriculture or recycled.

Streamline the approval process. The approval and licensing process can be arduous and expensive. Once an aquaculture precinct has been established, automatic approval should be granted to farms designed within the guidelines.

Support research into innovations. QCFA members are currently working with research establishments to design a robotic feeder, thus simplifying the labour intensive task of feeding ponds. Some may see this as a toy in respect to a family sized farm, but it is essential to the viability of a major operation. This research needs to be prioritised and funded.

Support industry efforts to encourage new industry entrants: Funding and organisation expertise is required for promotional efforts such as conferences , workshops, publicity and to promote and publicise the progress the industry has made over the last 8 years.

Establishment of a centralised marketing operation. Maturity of the industry has a natural consequence of a need for sophistication of marketing effort. The current individual marketing by farmers is satisfactory at present, but will lead to chaos as production increases. Consider the result if sugar cane farmers marketed their product individually. A centralised processing and marketing establishment needs to be encouraged. Promotion of the availability of the product will be essential.

Concessional loans be made available to companies or individuals having a genuine desire to enter the industry. The industry has suffered damage in the past from one major project that was doomed to failure from the outset. Care needs to be taken so as not to have a repetition of this impediment to the reputation of the industry.

CONCLUSION:

The redclaw industry holds the view that any expansion of the industry should be to the benefit of Australia and Australians, the product being a native Australian animal. The Queensland Crayfish Farmers Association (QCFA) is well situated to assist prospective farmers with a wealth of information and experience accumulated since the industry's inception.

John Stevenson
President QCFA