



## **ROCKAQUA PTY LTD t/a ROCKY POINT PRAWN FARM**

In opening, I would firstly like to thank the Committee for their dogged determination to identify the deficiencies in our current systems and I look forward to reading your recommendations.

The early German settlers to this area had come to Australia to seek religious freedom and the first thing they did was build a Lutheran church in the area, cleared very heavily timbered land in order to grow subsistence crops and sugar cane.

In the early 1880s Johannes Georg Zipf arrived in Pimpama Island now called Woongoolba, which was surrounded by swamps. These were progressively cleared by hand, with roads made from ti-tree logs; some of which still lie under current roads.

Johannes married in South Brisbane and had ten boys.

My father -in-law Trevor, is the son of one of those ten boys. He, along with his brothers cleared massive tracts of land with modern machinery and transformed the swampland into fertile land as it was successfully drained with the establishment of the Bremerhaven drainage system.

Trevor and his brother Keith later entered into a partnership with my husband Murray to establish an aquaculture farm as a diversification from cane in 1984. They started with WA marron, and then progressed to prawns.

We also own a prawn hatchery, which combined with the two other hatcheries on the Logan River, supply 70% of the industry throughout New South Wales and Queensland with seedstock, as well replenishment of wild stocks for Fisheries departments in two states.

Our hatchery has supplied as far afield as Fiji, Chile, Canada, Israel, and the United States.

Along the way they, together with other Logan River prawn farmers, participated in numerous R&D projects, which have helped write the textbook on prawn farming in Australia.

Key projects included a joint CSIRO/FRDC study to determine the appropriate regulatory settings for regulating prawn farms by defining the nutrient loads created by farms. Further to that, assessment of alternative methods of treatment of discharges including use of bio filters such as oysters and aquatic plants, and settlement ponds to enable reuse of water within the farm.

Ironically this work is now even more critical after the white spot disease outbreak as one of the key biosecurity measure farms have adopted overseas is to treat, recirculate and reuse waters within the farm.

Another project was conducted with the James Cook University's School of Engineering to conduct energy audits and determine the efficiency of variable speed drivers on paddlewheels. This work was incorporated into the eco-efficiency audit on our farm as part of our accreditation for a world first ISO 9001 and then ISO 14001 with the United Nations Environment Program's "Cleaner Production Program" at the University of Queensland and the then Queensland Department of Environment and Resource Management.

This work was further developed by the Queensland government to form the template for farms wishing to develop environmental management systems or gain the ISO14001 Environmental Quality Assurance accreditation.

The development of a genetic breeding program where prawns were selected for faster growing, higher survival strains was also pioneered on our farm along with the CSIRO and the Australian Institute of Marine Science in Townsville.

Later as we expanded to a new species for export, we developed a live prawn transport project with the FRDC/Seafood Services Australia and the then Queensland Department of Primary Industries. Supply chain development work was funded by the Prime Minister's Supermarket to Asia Council, which resulted in the opening of an export office in Japan by the then deputy leader of the National Party and Trade Minister, Mark Vaile.

These projects are highlighted as they represent a significant investment by the Australian taxpayer, by State government and by private enterprise to develop a once fledging industry. It represents sacrifices made and continual reinvestment by families on the Logan with the belief that they were investing in their children's and indeed grandchildren's future on the land.

The effect of white spot will have flow on effects for the industry beyond South East Queensland, as hatcheries will be fallowed for at least one year thereby creating a shortage in seedstock for farms. The conditions under which farms and hatcheries will be permitted to operate under are still unclear and in fact, the viability of ever operating again is very much up in the air.

There will be flow on effects for charities ranging from the local show society, schools and churches, through to community development in the Kimberly with indigenous groups and internationally with philanthropic works in Asia and Africa.

There will be flow on effects for local communities beyond the obvious stakeholders like employees and small businesses in our supply chain. Our farm has been a long- term participant in a camping program for at risk high school- aged boys.

The pleasure of being able to provide an environment for these young men, typically from entrenched welfare dependant families, to camp for a week and to realise the self worth which comes with work, emerging with a work reference which could be used to gain a part time job as a foothold into the workforce- these are some of the real losses for us as family.

From the 13th February when tests confirmed the presence of disease on our farm to today, uncertainty, endless rounds of meetings, phone calls and a sense of bewilderment at how we have arrived here have defined the rhythm of life.

Uncertainty and frustration have been formed the basis of our interactions with stakeholders who have vested interests to protect.

There are more questions than answers, some key ones which I pose here:

1. Can DAWR demonstrate any genuine attempts to find a way to communicate the heightened levels of risk of a disease outbreak to either a State government body or to industry without compromising their investigative efforts? Was there advice obtained from Crown Law, from their own enforcement personnel? If not, who made that determination?
2. Where are the results of the genome sequencing work, which have been conducted by both the Queensland and Federal governments? Why have both levels of government continued to buck pass and refuse to release ANY results?
3. What was the cause of the delay in stopping product passing through the supply chain post disease outbreak? Was it a lack of will or resources and systems? If this was an instance of human health risk, this apparent lack of agility in stopping tainted product reaching consumers is of great concern. Or are we simply facing the reality of trade before biosecurity in this country?
4. What is the status of the importers whom the Department flagged as facing pending charges? Has there been a single successful prosecution arising from Operation Cattai?
5. What systems, if any, are in place to monitor and detect trends of non-compliance? What processes, if any, are in place to trigger action on repeated non-compliances?

6. How much confidence can the Australian public have that the marine environment is adequately protected by appropriately identified risks in imported seafood, not just prawns?
7. Are there appropriate mechanisms in place to protect not just the environment but also human health? Statistics published under the Imported Food Inspection Scheme would suggest that closer attention needs to be paid to the failure rates in imported seafood for antibiotic residues. The notion of a level playing field is a façade when you consider that Australian exporters must submit and pass these very same tests before our product can even leave our shores.
8. Has the Department merely outsourced their Biosecurity responsibilities by now requiring exporting countries to certify the disease-free status of their product before leaving their shores? Bearing in mind that many of these countries are in the developing world where corruption is rife, the question of how easily these certifications can be illegitimately obtained and therefore what currency we can seriously place on them needs to be asked.
9. Does the Department believe that the mere act of marinating destroys the presence of white spot in prawns? How can they justify their assertion that likelihood of diversion of product to unintended uses such as bait or burley is low when the price of bait prawns is \$30/kg, peeled imported prawns \$28/kg, marinated imported prawns \$24/kg? When fishing forums online continue to advocate the use of this product as the cheapest bait available? I recently attended a members fishing night at a BCF store where the guest speaker advised the crowd of hundreds of anglers specifically that supermarket prawns were the cheapest source of bait.
10. Has the Department audited the volumes of wild-caught Australia prawn processed overseas with the volumes re-entering Australia? Can they demonstrate that there have been no anomalies?
11. What was the extent of the Department's internal investigations as to officers who were not following "their work procedures"? Did the Department retrospectively attempt to identify whether there were any links between importers and certain officers? Were there any links between product which subsequently failed testing and certain officers? Was there an official report produced as a result of this investigation?
12. What was the failure rate of the two million kilograms of imported product already in the supply chain? What verification can the Department provide that diseased stock was in fact destroyed or re-exported and not "re-purposed" in another form?

However, it is two very simple questions from our children, which have caused the greatest angst - will we ever get to farm again Mum and Dad? Do we have a farm to come back to when we finish Uni?

Josiah Stamp, President Bank of England is quoted as saying that "It is easy to dodge our responsibilities, but we cannot dodge the consequences of dodging our responsibilities". I would remind the public servants in Canberra that in the discharge of their duties, they must not be guided by utilitarian principles where the benefit of the majority come at the expense of the few, and that the consequences of their action, or inaction in this case, have caused immense hardship to a multitude of families.