



Queensland Crayfish Farmers Association Inc.

QCFA

John Stevenson, President

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SUBMISSION – OPPORTUNITIES for EXPANDING THE AQUACULTURE INDUSTRY IN NORTHERN AUSTRALIA

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:

Unfortunately those successful farmers have reached or are approaching retirement and need replacing with new blood. 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, seeking grants for industry advancement and establishment of a progressive industry website and research levy. The results are starting to be seen as new and prospective serious farmers are joining the industry. Unfortunately, their enthusiasm and commitment is dampened somewhat by the stringent and costly conditions existing as part of the application process

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Ability to commercialise new innovations;

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, 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. This can be achieved by the implementation of recent ground breaking developments and 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 and an innovative robotic feeder is on the drawing board.

Develop new aquaculture projects and products;

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. Waste water from the redclaw farm is ideal for crop irrigation

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 including a financial model. At this time other projects have first priority on our limited funds and this study is on hold until further funds become available.

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

Seek out new markets:

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.

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