

MEDIA RELEASE

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NO NEED FOR PRAWN PRICES TO RISE, SAYS INDUSTRY But look for more Queensland prawns in the shops!

FISHERMEN say there is no need for prawn prices to rise in the shops after imported uncooked prawns are banned -- but you can expect to see more of our own local catch on sale.

"One of the big attractions of imported prawns for wholesalers and retailers is that they are so cheap, there is a big mark-up available when they are sold in the shops for what people expect prawn prices to be," said industry spokesman Neil Green today.

"Queensland has top-quality prawns to replace banned imports and they can be sold economically in the shops but won't provide the same percentage of profit for marketers.

"Queensland fishermen will have to be paid more for their prawns than producers in third-world countries where cheap aquaculture practices and low-wage processing means prawns can be imported into Australia for less than our cost of production."

Mr Green, President of the Queensland Seafood Industry Association (QSIA), said there had been widespread speculation that prawn prices would rise in the shops.

"Even Federal Agriculture Minister Peter McGauran recently told reporters he expected prawn prices to rise but this certainly does not have to be the case."

He said several factors were making the economics of prawn fishing tough but at the top of the list were cheap imports.

"Imported Asian prawns have been under-cutting prices offered for Queensland product. As one example, for good quality North Queensland Endeavour prawns, fishermen have been offered as little as \$4 a kg. That would amaze people when they see prawn prices in the shops.

"Endeavour prawns were voted by a taste-test panel at a national prawn conference as the best-tasting of any variety in Australia. Yet, fishermen get offered \$4 a kg. That's a disgrace. Fishermen could get two or three times that price and still leave a healthy margin for re-sellers."

He said the ban on imported raw prawns was expected to be in place before the end of next month (September) but the effects would take time to be seen in the shops.

"This ban has been expected for months, so I am sure there are freezers all over Australia stocked up with the cheap foreign stuff. But, eventually, this will be run down and we should see the demand for local product increase.

"In the meantime, I advise Queensland seafood-lovers to ask for Queensland prawns and other local seafood," he said.

"Thanks to country-of-origin labelling, shoppers can see where each type of seafood on sale was harvested. Queensland catches more prawns than any other State, so any prawns you see in the shops here labelled "Product of Australia" are more than likely from Queensland.

Mr Green said the ban on imported raw prawns was being introduced by the Federal Government because of scientific evidence that they could carry foreign diseases of prawns that could cause mass mortalities in Australian prawns and other crustaceans.

"They do not affect humans but are fatal to crustaceans. They are prawn diseases we don't have and don't want in this country. They could devastate Australia's \$600-million-a-year prawn industry and are too big a risk."

He said this was not connected to the more recent announcement from the Federal Government that testing had discovered banned antibiotics in imported seafood.

"It is alarming that Government tests found banned antibiotics in almost one-third of all imported seafood samples -- 31 out of 100 -- and we expect action on this issue as well.

"The United States is currently refusing entry to seafood lines known to carry banned antibiotics and we expect the Australian Government will do the same, and step up testing.

"The antibiotics come from poor aquaculture practices in countries like China, Viet Nam, Thailand and Indonesia. These are all farmed fish or farmed prawns involved, and the antibiotics are used to try to control diseases in crowded ponds. This is one of the reasons these countries can produce such large quantities of farmed prawns and fish so cheaply.

"But no-one wants a dose of antibiotics when they eat seafood. If I want antibiotics, I'll go to the doctor."

Mr Green said anyone concerned about which seafood to eat had a simple solution.

"Just eat Queensland seafood," he said. "It's the best in the world."

Further information:

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