

Australian prawn industry quality standard: development of a third party audited seafood industry quality standard for prawn vessels and processors incorporating food safety standards

Australian Prawn Promotion Association
Research Provider

Phillip Walsh
Martin Perkins
Principal Investigators



Project No. 1999/351

NON TECHNICAL SUMMARY

**1999/351 Australian prawn industry quality standard:
development of a third party audited seafood industry quality
standard for prawn vessels and processors incorporating
food safety standards**

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Mr Martin Perkins

ADDRESS:

33 Pankina Street

Sunnybank

Brisbane QLD 4109

Telephone: 07 3344 2055

Fax: 07 3344 2620

Mobile: 0411 231 057

Objectives:

To initiate a quality management system for the Australian sea-caught prawn industry.

1. To review, validate and update the Code of Practice to ensure it establishes an agreed set of standards across the industry, applicable and achievable in all fisheries, covering boats and shore based processing operations and all markets.
2. To establish a training regime by creating a core of trainers to implement a 'train the trainer' program so that trawler crews and shore based processing staff thoroughly understand the requirements and their responsibilities in catching and processing the product, with a support network to provide assistance and advice.
3. To provide assistance with development of Food Safety Plans and adoption of ISO 9002 standards.
4. To develop a third party audit certification quality management system based on the industry quality standards in the Code of Practice.
5. To undertake a single audit incorporating quality and standards to be agreed by all regulatory authorities: all States, the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service, and Food Standards Australia New Zealand.
6. To ensure that the quality management system is capable of modular expansion to incorporate standards for occupational health and safety, environmental protection and sustainable trawling.

OUTCOMES ACHIEVED TO DATE:

OCTOBER BOARD 02

The handbook "Handling Prawns at Sea – A guide for Prawn Trawler Crew at Level 1" was produced by the Australian Prawn Industry Association. 1000 copies were distributed to all prawn trawlers throughout Australia.

JUNE 03 BOARD

Approval was given on 26/5/03 to reprint the handbook "Handling Prawns at Sea – A guide for Prawn Trawler Crew at Level 1" as well as to print 500 copies of the handbook "Handling Prawns at Sea – A guide for Prawn Trawler Skippers and Crew at Advanced Level "

AUGUST 03 BOARD

Handbooks have been finalised and are now available for purchase through SSA outlets, ph 1300130 321 to order copies.

Acknowledgments:

Phillip Walsh:
Food Factotum, original Principal Investigator
Grant Carnie:
Australian Fisheries Academy, author of the 2 learning guides.
Charles Willoughby:
Executive Officer, APPA
Mrs Bev Dorloff:
Treasurer/APIA Director
Lisa McKenzie:
A Raptis & Sons
Marianne Barber:
Extraordinary Prawn Quality Assurance Officer.
PM Learning and Development:
Formatting and design experts.
Peter Pownall:
Project mentor
Members of the Australian Prawn Industry Association:
Provided editing and proof reading assistance of the Learning Guides.

Background:

APPA's aim was to improve the image and value of Australian sea-caught prawns in international markets. In order to achieve this, the industry must ensure that it processes and offers consistent high quality and high value food. The customers must be able to recognise and reward the high quality through demand for 'clean and natural' Australian sea-caught prawns, distinguishing them from farmed product and from sea-caught product from other origins.
The development of an industry quality standard and the method of getting it out to all vessels were regarded as a key support tool. This would ensure that a consistent quality image was created for importers and consumers.

Need:

Australia's major export markets are demanding increasingly higher standards and assurances that quality standards will be maintained. Food safety is also being demanded from the export markets and from the domestic market and it is important that standards are established and that methods of maintaining standards are implemented.

Objectives:

To initiate a Quality Management System for the Australian sea-caught prawn industry by:

- A) Reviewing, validating and updating the Code of Practice to ensure it establishes an agreed set of standards across the industry, applicable and achievable in all fisheries, covering boats, and shore-based processing operations and all markets.

This objective of the project has been achieved by incorporating the Prawn Code of Practice that was developed in the early stages of the project into two Learning Guides. A considerable amount of consultation was needed to agree on a uniform set of standards. The standards in the Learning Guides have been unanimously accepted by industry. All prawn vessels were provided with a copy of the Guide for Prawn Trawler Crew at Level 1 and good sales of the reprint and the Advanced Guide through the SSA network have been recorded.

- B) Establishing a training regime by creating a core of trainers to implement a “train the trainer” program so that trawler crews and shore based processing staff thoroughly understand the requirements and their responsibilities in catching and processing the product, with a support network to provide assistance and advice. Assistance with the development of Food Safety Plans and adoption of ISO 9002 standards will also be provided.

The two Learning Guides have provided a valuable resource for training prawn trawler crew. Early in the project trial training courses were carried out in Cairns and Darwin using material developed from the two Guides. One large prawn company uses this material for crew training prior to each prawn season. Guidelines for Food Safety Plans are included in the Guides, and these are being used by RTO's in Queensland during food safety training and development of Food Safety Plans for prawn vessels. Farmbis in Queensland has provided extensive funds to carry out training in Food Safety and establishment of vessel based standards. The two guides are the main resources used in this training of prawn trawler crew. There is also a Trainers Guide available in electronic format to provide background resources and assessment tools. Very few vessels have expressed a desire to take up ISO 9002 accreditation, and some of those vessels that took up ISO during a previous project have now let it slip.

- C) Developing a third party auditable certification quality management system based on the industry quality standards in the Code Of Practice: a single audit will incorporate quality and regulatory standards – AQIS, State and FSANZ requirements and be agreed by all regulatory authorities.

The development of the SSA Australian Seafood Standard and the proposed development of the FSANZ Seafood Standard will enable the industry to have a 3rd party auditable quality management system. AQIS are proposing to incorporate the FSANZ non-prescriptive standard so that vessels and prawn processors will meet all requirements with one audit. When these Standards are fully implemented it will be much easier to add the prawn code of practice to the standard and be audited on the prawn industry standard. The trend for AQIS to become less prescriptive has made the 2 guides invaluable to prawn buyers and prawn processors as they document common industry standards.

- D) Ensuring that the quality management system is capable of modular expansion to incorporate standards for Occupational Health and Safety, environmental protection and sustainable trawling.

The two learning guides have been produced in the same format as the competencies in the Seafood Training Package and this will make it easy to produce similar modules for Occupational Health and Safety, environmental protection and sustainable trawling. OH & S is already a competency in the training package and this can be dovetailed into the learning guides.

SSA has produced EMS training programs and they are being used in the primary sector throughout Australia. Farmbis are funding fishermen to take part in the EMS training sessions to develop Environment Management Plans for their particular fishery.

Methods:

The initial part of the project was about consultation with industry to ensure that the Code of Practice was unilaterally accepted. It was essential to establish a code that was applicable to all sectors of the prawn industry throughout Australia. The production of the two Learning Guides tied in with the methodology and structure that was used in the production of the units of competency for the Seafood Training Package.

Consultation with industry and alignment with existing resources were the two key methods used to achieve outcomes that fulfilled the objectives of the project.

Results/Discussion:

The production of the two learning guides – “Handling Prawns at Sea, A Guide for Prawn Trawler Crew at Level 1 – ISBN 0-9581998-0-9” and “Handling Prawns at Sea, A guide for Prawn Trawler Skippers and Crew at Advanced Level – ISBN 0-9581998-1-7” were the main results of this project. The Code of Practice and the training materials that were developed early in the project were incorporated into the guides so that the initial results could be disseminated in a user-friendly format. The format can be used with the training package to deliver competencies towards real qualifications for trawler crew and skippers. There is also a Trainers Guide in electronic format that provides resources, lesson plans and assessment tools. This is a valuable aid for trainers and training organisations.

Copies of the 4 parts of the Code of Practice have already been supplied to FRDC (up to date electronic copies will be supplied to FRDC and SSA as part of the final report). The 4 volumes of the code have been incorporated in the 2 learning guides and are in a much user-friendlier format so that all crewmembers will get access to them.

Benefits and adoption:

The major benefit of the project has to produce genuine industry agreed standards. These standards include uniform quality and grading standards that can be used and upheld by all sectors of the prawn industry. Also, the learning guides provide guidelines on how to maintain the standards set and also how to train new crew in the standards.

The adoption by industry has been phenomenal – virtually every prawn vessel in Australia has a copy available, either to supplement the owners or company’s manual or to be used as the vessel manual. The lay flat format in waterproof paper gives the learning guides an extended life span.

There have been measurable benefits to the crews of the vessels using the learning guide as purchasing companies are paying significantly better prices to those vessels who meet all the requirements of the standard. Those vessels that are deemed after assessment of their product not to have achieved the desired standards have a defined guideline and set methods on how to meet the standards.

Georgie Francis – QA officer for the A Raptis & Sons prawn fleet in the Gulf of Carpentaria is full of praise for the Learning Guide. Although the company have their own manual that explains company policy all new crew are asked to read and learn from the learners guide to ensure they understand what they are doing and why they are doing it.

Further Development:

The Learning Guides are available for purchase from Seafood Services Australia (ph1300 130 321) and the only recommendation would be to continue to advertise these publications as part of their range of products. Very little about the Guides will need updating as the research has identified all the standards that have been established over the last 20 years. There is also a Trainer Guide available in electronic format that should be supplied to RTO's or Trainers when they purchase the Learning Guides.

When either the Australian Seafood Standard or the FSANZ Seafood Standard are launched for adoption by industry then the Codes of Practice produced by this project will be able to be used as background resources to ensure the prawn industry has standards to work towards.

As part of the ongoing development of Codes of Practice throughout the Seafood Industry in Australia – it would be valuable to the industry if the Codes were converted to Learning Guides as was done in this project.

User friendly Learning Guides consistent with the training package that are presented on waterproof paper in a lay flat format should be an essential outcome of all future Code of Practice projects. This would ensure that the standards set in the Codes would be disseminated down to the worker level.

Planned outcomes:

The seafood industry's strategic plan includes the outcome of achieving seafood excellence. This project has provided the tools for the prawn industry to work towards this goal. The 2 Learning Guides and the Trainer Guide are the tools for the industry to be trained in the competencies needed to improve consumer confidence in quality, consistency and safety.

The project outputs of the Australian Sea Caught Code of Practice, the Learning Guides and Trainer Guide have contributed to the outcome of having better trained crew in the competencies required to maintain the standards set by the code of practice. When the code is combined with the Australian Seafood Standard the outcome will be

the achievement of a single audit that will be approved by all regulatory bodies that will be specific to the prawn industry.

Conclusion:

In the risk analysis for the project one of the major threats was identified as a lack of commitment by industry. This has not been evident as the prawn industry throughout Australia has requested copies of the Learning Guides and there were plenty of volunteers for training courses that were run throughout the project. Cooperation from industry has been exceptional with volunteers throughout Australia offering help with proof reading and also trialing the Learning Guides on their vessels.

The 4 volumes of the Wild Caught Prawn Code of Practice and the 2 Learning Guides have been unanimously signed off by industry. With the rationalisation of the Queensland East Coast fishery these 'ultimate' guides to standards and procedures have become invaluable tools for the industry. They are being used for training crew, for establishing consistent standards by prawn buyers and processors and as reference book for "old hands".

The ultimate aim of the project was to have a standard that could be audited as part of meeting AQIS and FSANZ standards. This aim of 3rd party auditing is getting closer to reality with the revision of the Processed Food Orders and also the production of an Australian Seafood Standard. The code of practice will be able to be incorporated into the new legislation and become part of the material that is audited.

The code of practice and the learning guides will go a long way towards promoting the seafood industry's strategic plan for achieving seafood excellence.

References:

Australian Sea Caught Prawns – Code of Practice
The Australian Prawn Industry Association – Handling Prawns at Sea – A guide for Prawn Trawler Crew at Level One – Learning Guide.
The Australian Prawn Industry Association – Handling Prawns at Sea – A guide for Prawn Trawler Skippers and Crew at Advanced Level – Learning Guide.
Food Quality & Safety Program for Trawlers – a guide to producing a food safety program.
Trainer Guide – Basic and Advanced Copy

Intellectual Property:

The only intellectual property could be the Code of Practice. This code is a formalised version of what

FINAL REPORT – Project 1999/351

happens (or should happen) on prawn trawlers around the world. It is possibly a saleable item translated into French and Spanish for the European and South American prawn fleets.

Staff:

Martin Perkins – Principal Investigator
Phillip Walsh – original Principal Investigator
Bev Dorloff – Treasurer/APIA Director
Charles Willoughby – Executive Officer APPA
Grant Carnie – Australian Fisheries Academy

Distribution:

NSW FRAB
QLD FRAB
SA FRAB
WA FRAB
AFMA – Northern Prawn Fishery
SSA
The Librarian, CSIRO Division of Marine Research
The National Library of Australia
Peter Pownall - NORMAC