



Black tiger prawn | *Penaeus monodon*

A Snapshot of Prawn Aquaculture

Overview

While prawn farming commenced in the Northern Territory in the 1980's, early attempts failed to reach commercial success for a number of reasons. Today there are several prawn farms established and many millions of dollars are invested in them.

Species

Australia has several species of prawns that are suitable for aquaculture. In the Northern Territory the two key species presently farmed are the Black tiger prawn (*Penaeus monodon*) and the Redleg banana prawn (*Fenneropenaeus indicus*).

The Black tiger prawn is relatively uncommon in the wild and there are some difficulties in obtaining adequate brood stock.

Production

Prawn aquaculture is conducted in earthen ponds in areas with access to seawater. Northern Territory producers have the right conditions to harvest two crops a year, while southern producers have a shorter growing season. Harvest yields in the NT average 4 – 5 tonnes per hectare per crop. Work is being carried out by private enterprise on the development of techniques to close the life cycle of farmed prawns.

Product

Product is sold as chilled, frozen, cooked and green.

Markets

With the huge increase in volume of cheap imported aquacultured prawns, the domestic markets for Northern Territory aquacultured prawns have suffered. A focussed marketing strategy by Australian prawn producers and stricter Government enforcement of labelling laws for imported product are key strategies being pursued by industry to retain an adequate share of domestic markets.

Future

Prawn farming is a capital intensive and quite high risk venture. For instance, a typical prawn farm costs around \$85,000 per hectare of ponds to develop.

Market access and price received for product are two key elements which will govern the further development of prawn farming in the Northern Territory. There is also continuing interest in widening the range of species that can be produced.

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