YEAR IN REVIEW
2017
Chairman’s Message

This year was a chance for the Northern Territory Seafood Council to pause, reflect and look at how it can improve on the job it does for its members.

The Seafood Council is developing a five-year strategic plan to improve communication, build trust and increase sustainability for members of the Northern Territory seafood industry.

The Seafood Council is using a more collaborative approach, rather than defending our position or the seafood industry with facts and figures. Instead, we have been working with our stakeholders to acknowledge their concerns and come up with solutions on how we can work together.

We are building stronger relationships with our stakeholders, including the Northern Land Council (NLC) and Northern Territory Government, and these relationships have changed significantly in 2017. After attending two NLC Full Council meetings during the year, the NLC agreed to extend a waiver for permits to allow professional fishers access to the intertidal zone for another 12 months.

The Seafood Council met the Minister for Primary Industry and Resources Ken Vowles three times in 2017, as well as several chance meetings, which has helped our relationship grow stronger. The Minister now understands our industry more and we better understand the constraints of government.

We understand Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities want to be involved in our fisheries management and in our industry, they want to be able monitor and control who comes in and accesses their intertidal areas. Together, we can find a way forward and I am confident by working together we will come up with viable options to put to the NLC Full Council.

We are already seeing rewards from the Seafood Council’s more proactive approach after members of the Maningrida community called for a closure to the Barramundi Fishery. The Seafood Council met with members of the community on the ground in Maningrida to listen to their concerns, and it was heartening to hear the Minister say he would not be closing fisheries as a knee jerk reaction.

To help deliver on improving efficiencies at the Seafood Council we completed a governance review and are looking at how we operate as a Board and in committees. I recognise with change comes some fear but also opportunity, and I am very pleased with how the Seafood Council Board is embracing this change. As part of the strategic planning process, the Board developed a draft constitution that details changes to the Board and committee structures.

The draft constitution looked at how our committees can be strengthened and empowered by joining together as one voice on the common issues that affect them.

We want to bring groups together, while recognising there are distinct differences between the inshore, offshore, and diving and aquaculture fisheries, as well as unique challenges. The Seafood Council can then focus on the issues that affect the whole industry and drive our local seafood industry forward to build social licence. We also want to resource our member committees better, acknowledging they are all business owners who already have busy lives.

Our draft constitution was voted down at the recent annual general meeting, but I see that as part of a healthy discussion and shows our members are engaged in this process and want it to work. We will take in the feedback from members and come back with a second draft constitution for consideration in 2018.

Once we have our house in order, a streamlined, effective Board, good relationships with stakeholders and our committees are working well, community support among the public will grow naturally.

We won’t be those fishermen who are the enemy, we will be a valued and respected part of the Northern Territory community. We are all proud of being fishermen and we want the public to be proud of the professional fishing industry too.

The Seafood Council has reflected deeply on how it can do better because our members deserve more.

At the end of the day, I want effective committees that are resource and have a strong voice – I want an effective Board that is skills based to make decisions and gets things done. Once this is achieved I see the Seafood Council moving forward to become a trusted, respected and effective advocate for the Northern Territory seafood industry.

DANIEL KIMBERLEY
Chairman
We spent 2017 implementing those changes, including developing a new five-year strategic plan for the Seafood Council. As part of this process we looked at what the Seafood Council is here for and why, as well as how we engage and communicate with our members and stakeholders.

For me personally, it has been a relief to focus our energy on identifying where we can make a difference for the Northern Territory seafood industry and then make that difference matter. It was evident that the Seafood Council had been stretched too thin, trying to deal with so many issues, and despite all the hard work and efforts of everyone – the Board, staff and the industry – we weren’t achieving what we needed to.

While the Seafood Council would like to take on every challenge for the industry, we need to recognise we don’t have the resources to do that and need to better focus our resources on local issues.

In June, we welcomed the official launch of Australia’s first national peak body representing the seafood industry – Seafood Industry Australia (SIA). I am really excited that we now have resources in place to deal with national issues for the industry, which gives the Seafood Council more time and resources to concentrate on local industry issues.

I am enormously grateful to Lyn Lambeth and Donna English for their help while I took long service leave this year. We farewelled Lyn in mid 2017, who has been a very valuable member of our team for the past eight years and we wish her well in her new creative adventures. Donna and I have remained a team of two, working hard over the past six months to finalise the new strategic plan, including adopting our new proactive communication approach, reviewing governance and developing a new constitution.

It has been an incredibly big year.

Part of the reason we have had years of dysfunction in relation to supporting industry and fisheries management is the previous ‘head in the sand’ reactive style of communication and combative approach to user groups. We realised we had to change, we cannot stay the same as an industry.

The Seafood Council needs to innovate and invest and develop strong relationships with our stakeholders to give us the ability to tackle issues about industry proactively rather than take a regulatory approach. The Seafood Council is already seeing the benefits of its new approach, with the Board and Chair Daniel Kimberley embracing the new proactive and collaborative style. It has been a big learning curve for all but it has had immediate impacts.

Our less combative approach with user groups saw the Seafood Council sit down with the Northern Territory Government, Amateur Fishermen’s Association NT, professional fishers and fishing tour operators in 2017 to examine a fishery issue and find a solution together. A major gap in legislation was discovered and we pushed as a group for it to be fixed – it was a quick and unified approach. Developing these relationships with our user groups is crucial for the Seafood Council to provide a voice for its members, build trust and achieve effective change for the seafood industry.

Daniel has brought a fresh set of eyes and approach as Chair of the Seafood Council in 2017, which I have found rejuvenating. It was great to see Daniel meet with disgruntled members and hear their concerns first hand.

I have appreciated the support from members who have already seen a difference in how the Seafood Council is reacting to issues raised in the media and our more collaborative approach with user groups. I would also like to thank the Board members who have volunteered extra time for additional workshops as part of the strategic planning process, and who have truly listened and responded to the feedback.

In 2018 we will look to add to our team, once we determine the skills and resources needed to help support the Seafood Council to implement the strategic plan and support members at a fisheries management level.
Contents

Chairman’s Message 2
CEO’s Message 3
Contents 4
Minister’s Message 5
Strategic Plan – looking ahead 6
Future proofing the Northern Territory Seafood Industry 6
Let’s secure the future of our fisheries together 7
Sustainability of fisheries through accountability 8-9
A celebration of excellence at NT Awards 10
National Awards – finalist and winners 11
Barramundi test case for building trust 12
Blue Mud Bay update 13
Strategic Plan, Goals and Achievements 14
Commonwealth Marine Parks update 15
Darwin Harbour Clean-Up 2017 16
Snapshot of key projects in 2017 17
Committee Achievements 18
NTSC Board and Staff Structure as at December 2017 23
2017 Fisheries Review 24
Minister’s Message

What a year for the Territory seafood industry! It has been a busy 12 months and I have enjoyed supporting the industry in several ways, one of the most important being finalising the Mud Crab harvest strategy.

Carried out through extensive consultation with stakeholders through the Mud Crab Fishery Management Advisory Committee (MCFMAC), the harvest strategy will support this valuable fishery and improve its long term sustainability. Importantly, it was based on science and represents the best standards in contemporary fisheries management. I thank the MCFMAC for their efforts.

In another move to protect Territory seafood stocks, earlier this year the Northern Territory Government introduced measures to combat the growing black market in Black Jewfish swim bladders. With the bladders reaching between $200-500 per kilogram through illegal sales, more and more pressure was being placed on this vulnerable species. Commercial fishers must now tag swim bladders to show they are legally caught.

Elsewhere in the industry, Project Sea Dragon, which would see one of the largest prawn farms in the world located here in the Territory, has reached a significant milestone with Seafarms granted a Non-Pastoral Use Permit. This is a major Project for the Northern Territory Government and shows what can happen when government, private enterprise and Aboriginal landholders join forces.

Another private enterprise going great guns is Humpty Doo Barramundi. This year, they have expanded and branched out into the sashimi market, sending samples of Barramundi to respected sashimi chefs in Sydney, Singapore and Tokyo.

They were a well-deserved winner at the National Seafood Industry Awards in September, along with the Australian Maritime and Fisheries Academy for its Commercial Fishing Operations Skills for Northern Territory Indigenous Communities program, and Frying Nemo Fish & Chippery in Darwin. At the awards, commercial fisherman Bill Passey of Australia Bay Seafoods was inducted into the Hall of Fame for his visionary approach to fishing in the Northern Territory.

Other Northern Territory finalists were Chris Calogeras, Monsoon Aquatics, Australia Bay Seafoods and Saffron Restaurant. To have this many finalists and winners was a remarkable achievement for a jurisdiction of our size, and shows what a bright future the Territory’s seafood industry has.

With that future in mind, I am working hard to continue permit-free access to areas affected by the Blue Mud Bay decision. In December 2016, the Northern Land Council said permit-free access would only continue until the end of June 2017.

After that, the Northern Territory Government and Northern Land Council (NLC) established a Negotiating Committee of Traditional Owners and key fishing stakeholders, including the Northern Territory Seafood Council, and the NLC recently agreed to extend the permit waiver period until 31 December 2018. In the meantime, I will continue to consult on this issue and work towards a more permanent outcome.

Finally, in the past year it has been good to see the Seafood Council working towards a secure future for the Northern Territory seafood industry by developing a new strategic plan, aimed at building community support.

Earning a social licence to operate is increasingly important for industry, and this proactive approach should help the seafood industry be better placed to handle future issues and achieve the best outcomes for our fisheries.

The strategic plan is set to be released in 2018 and I look forward to supporting the industry through another productive year.

KEN VOWLES
Minister For Primary Industry And Resources
Strategic Plan – looking ahead

In 2017, the Northern Territory Seafood Council Board identified the need to change strategically and operationally and adopt a new five-year strategic plan.

The new five-year strategic plan 2018–2023 focusses on the following three key pillars to build social licence and deliver member value:

- improve structures for an effective Seafood Council
- build trust in the industry by the Seafood Council’s members, community and government
- demonstrate sustainability.

The new plan supersedes the 2014-2019 strategic plan, which concentrated on securing greater natural resources for the seafood industry, greater impact on policy and implementation, improving support and recognition, professionalising the industry and encouraging innovation and best practice for its fisheries.

While these objectives remain important, the key aim of the new 2018–2023 strategic plan is to restore commercial rights and position the industry to regain its social licence to operate.

To achieve this, the Seafood Council has formed a new vision:

The Northern Territory Seafood Council is a trusted, stable and prosperous industry which is continually earning its social licence to operate.

Future proofing the Northern Territory Seafood Industry

The Northern Territory Seafood Council is working to establish a ‘social licence to operate’ with a new approach to community engagement.

To achieve a social licence the Northern Territory seafood industry needs to develop good relationships with all user groups by building up goodwill and trust. This requires industry to be responsive, honest and willing to change practices.

Having a social licence to operate involves not only doing the right thing, but for industry to have meaningful engagement among all user groups to show the industry can operate in the fisheries with high levels of accountability and sustainability to build local community support.

To achieve this, the Seafood Council and its members are adopting the following new approach to collaboration and communication:

- be open and honest
- acknowledge different views
- seek to understand the concerns
- resolve the issues together.

The Seafood Council acknowledges that to be effective, industry needs to communicate early about issues and bring key user groups together to gain support for a community agreement making process. The new approach will build:

- long term relationships based on a shared vision for the fishery
- government-endorsed agreement with clear rights, responsibilities, incentives and governance that supports beneficial outcomes for user groups
- risk-based solutions to ensure access to sustainable fisheries and economic benefits for industry
- long term relationships with Indigenous communities based on their involvement in the industry and realisation of Indigenous economic benefits.
Let’s secure the future of our fisheries together

The Northern Territory Seafood Council acknowledges it has not dealt well with the issues facing the local seafood industry.

Simply selling the benefits of the industry’s products is not enough to survive. The Seafood Council needs to demonstrate the industry’s collective environmental and social credentials to overcome shared challenges.

The Seafood Council recognises there is a significant lack of trust in the Northern Territory seafood industry, which is not seen as responsive to the concerns of its operators and local community members.

Industry currently faces concerns stemming from a lack of engagement, the loss of access to fisheries, a lack of investment and growing regulation as it struggles to resolve issues and to be heard as an industry.

The Seafood Council has heard and is listening to members’ concerns in several areas, including:

• overfishing and sustainability
• fishing stock access
• lack of industry engagement
• increasing regulations.

The Seafood Council wants to secure long term sustainable access to commercial fisheries by developing trusting relationships, which can deliver the best possible outcome for the Northern Territory.

It wants the Northern Territory seafood industry to be a sustainable and prosperous industry, which is mutually beneficial to everyone involved, including:

• Aboriginal communities
• recreational fishers
• smaller operators
• larger operators
• fishing tour operators.
The Seafood Council and its members operate alongside recreational fishers, fishing tour operators and Aboriginal communities. Our fisheries face many challenges and all user groups need to help resolve the issues, which include:

- increasing lack of trust between members of the Seafood Council and the community on issues such as sustainability and access to fish stocks
- concerns from Indigenous communities that they are not being fully involved in managing the waterways
- community and government concerns about the sustainability of the fisheries
- while aquaculture has grown and the demand for wild-caught is high, there has been little to no growth in our industry, particularly onshore, due to loss of access to fishing grounds
- lack of local industry growth is not helped by significant competition from low cost imported seafood products.

To help address these issues with all user groups, three projects in three wild-catch fisheries will be launched to create long term resource security and improve practices and the reputation of the Northern Territory Barramundi, Mud Crab and Offshore Finfish fisheries.

All three fishery sectors can encourage community support and improve financial viability by improving their operating credentials by bringing operators together to create a practical plan that guarantees change.

Following interviews with its key user groups, the Seafood Council identified the key steps recommended by user groups to develop a long term vision for the Barramundi, Mud Crab and Offshore Finfish Fishery are to:

- support industry governance and co-ordination
- develop structure, finance and governance for developing the long term vision and collaborative plan for the fishery that is supported by all sectors
- develop a strategy as a multi-stakeholder collaborative plan.
There were key opportunities raised that were common across all three fisheries, including to:

- communicate and grow awareness of the fishery, its challenges and impacts to build relevance for consumers and trust with user groups to position the industry as earning its social licence
- proactively engage with all key user groups including Indigenous, government, environment and recreational fishers to understand concerns and identify opportunities to work together on key issues such as how to reduce interactions and conflict between sectors
- adopt transparent reporting of impacts and interactions and share data to promote compliance and build trust in the fishery.

**Mud Crab**

Key opportunities raised for the Mud Crab Fishery to consider and prioritise are to:

- review governance and leadership of the NT Mud Crab Licensee Committee and its members to increase participation and recognise the diversity within the group and provide a safe platform for recommendations and succession
- develop a more secure long term access arrangement with key user groups through an evidence-based application of the Northern Territory Fisheries Resource Sharing Framework
- streamline and simplify regulations by developing clear standards and guidance especially for operators who are not fluent in English and make them available offline and also share with other user groups who are unaware of the stringent management regimes in place
- consider climate change implications and implement meaningful adaptations to address long term changing conditions and emerging challenges
- engage and increase participation with Indigenous communities to identify opportunities to grow involvement of Indigenous communities and increase capacity and skills in the fishery and ensure areas are not closed to professional crabbers
- identify supply chain and market opportunities for the Mud Crab industry including improving product consistency, pricing and developing premium branding around NT Mud Crab
- improve safety practices for the workforce through training, better communications for remote locations and culture change.

**Barramundi**

Key opportunities raised for the Barramundi fishery to consider and prioritise, are to:

- form a more coordinated and effective Barramundi Licensee Committee for operators in the industry to set a clear vision, engage with user groups and define a longer term approach to the fishery
- engage with Aboriginal communities to identify opportunities to grow their involvement of Aboriginal communities in the fishery
- develop a more secure long term access arrangement with key user groups through an evidence-based application of the Northern Territory Fisheries Resource Sharing Framework
- develop a better understanding of the supply chain and market opportunities for the Northern Territory Barramundi Fishery including opportunities for Barramundi and King Threadfin and improving product consistency
- improve safety practices for the workforce with training, improved communication for remote locations and culture change, safe anchorages
- develop a new management plan/harvest strategy that is acceptable to key user groups to ensure protection of breeding stock i.e. large fish
- establish signage in high density shared recreational/commercial fishing locations such as Dundee Beach.

**Offshore Finfish**

Key opportunities for the Offshore Finfish Fishery to consider and prioritise are to:

- unify the Timor Reef Licensee Committee and Northern Territory Demersal Fishermen’s Association to improve performance, capacity and engagement and address strategic issues facing the fishery
- develop a harvest strategy in collaboration with government and user groups to ensure the growth and success of the fishery
- reduce regulation complexity through a single jurisdiction approach
- develop voluntary good practice standards and guidance as a way to simplify regulations
- communicate and grow awareness of the fishery and its challenges and impacts in a way that builds relevance for consumers and trust with user groups to position the industry as earning its social licence
- identify supply chain and market opportunities such as country of origin labelling
- improve safety and environmental practices for the workforce with training in log books, use of observers and cameras to record interactions.
The awards evening was a reminder of just how lucky Territorians are to have access to delicious seafood.

Celebrated seafood restaurant Pee Wee’s at the Point hosted the night and tantalised guests with a special menu featuring Northern Territory seafood.

Pee Wees’ Executive Chef created delicious seafood canapes on arrival showcasing Paspaley Pearl Meat, NT Spanish Mackerel, Black Jewfish to NT Banana Prawns. Second course was a succulent choice of baked NT wild caught Barramundi and pan fried NT Goldband Snapper.

The Developing the North – 2017 Seafood Industry Awards presented awards across ten categories. The awards night recognises the passion, dedication and leadership for the many people who work hard in the Northern Territory seafood industry to bring seafood products to our plates.

Northern Territory Seafood Council Chairman Daniel Kimberley welcomed industry members and user groups on the night and recognised the importance of the seafood industry coming together to celebrate success.

He said the event was also a chance to learn more about each other within the industry and the wonderful community that is the Northern Territory seafood industry community.

The night was a great success and was well supported by industry. Guests were thrilled to see industry leader and Seafood Council Board member Chris Calogeras awarded the Industry Ambassador Award.

“After more than 30 years of dedicated service to the seafood industry, Chris is widely respected and admired for his leadership and contribution to the industry,” Seafood Council Chief Executive Officer Katherine Winchester said.

The appendix page displays the winners of the 2017 Seafood Industry Awards:

- **Industry Ambassador Award**
  - Sponsored by Developing the North
  - Winner: **Chris Calogeras**

- **Promotion Award**
  - Sponsored by Department of Tourism and Culture
  - Winner: **Women’s Industry Network Seafood Community**

- **Environment Award**
  - Sponsored by Darwin Port
  - Winner: **Sea Darwin – Bare Sand Island Marine Debris Initiative**

- **Restaurant Award**
  - Sponsored by Australia Bay Seafoods
  - Winner: **Saffron Restaurant**

- **Primary Producer Award**
  - Sponsored by Sydney Fish Markets
  - Winner: **Australia Bay Seafoods**

- **Take-Away Fish and Chips Award**
  - Sponsored by Fisheries Research and Development Corporation
  - Winner: **Frying Nemo Fish & Chippery**

- **People Development Award**
  - Sponsored by Northern Territory Seafood Council
  - Winner: **Australian Maritime Fisheries Academy**

- **Business Award (Small)**
  - Sponsored by Developing the North
  - Winner: **Monsoon Aquatics**

- **Business Award (Large)**
  - Sponsored by Developing the North
  - Winner: **Humpty Doo Barramundi Pty Ltd**

- **People’s Choice Take-Away Fish and Chips Award**
  - Sponsored by Fisheries Research and Development Corporation
  - Winner: **Jetty and the Fish**

- **Robert Ladlow Scholarship**
  - Awarded to: **Lex Wilson**

Seafood enjoyed at the awards night was generously donated by:

- **Adam Collins**
  - Paspaley Pearling Company

- **Australia Bay Seafoods**
  - Taroona Pty Ltd

- **Darwin Fish Market**
  - WA Seafood Exporters

- **Northern Seafoods**

The appendix page also features a photograph of award recipients and a list of sponsors for the event.

---

A celebration of excellence at NT Awards

Winners

- **Industry Ambassador Award**
  - Sponsored by Developing the North
  - Winner: Chris Calogeras

- **Promotion Award**
  - Sponsored by Department of Tourism and Culture
  - Winner: Women’s Industry Network Seafood Community

- **Environment Award**
  - Sponsored by Darwin Port
  - Winner: Sea Darwin – Bare Sand Island Marine Debris Initiative

- **Restaurant Award**
  - Sponsored by Australia Bay Seafoods
  - Winner: Saffron Restaurant

- **Primary Producer Award**
  - Sponsored by Sydney Fish Markets
  - Winner: Australia Bay Seafoods

- **Take-Away Fish and Chips Award**
  - Sponsored by Fisheries Research and Development Corporation
  - Winner: Frying Nemo Fish & Chippery

- **People Development Award**
  - Sponsored by Northern Territory Seafood Council
  - Winner: Australian Maritime Fisheries Academy

- **Business Award (Small)**
  - Sponsored by Developing the North
  - Winner: Monsoon Aquatics

- **Business Award (Large)**
  - Sponsored by Developing the North
  - Winner: Humpty Doo Barramundi Pty Ltd

- **People’s Choice Take-Away Fish and Chips Award**
  - Sponsored by Fisheries Research and Development Corporation
  - Winner: Jetty and the Fish

- **Robert Ladlow Scholarship**
  - Awarded to: Lex Wilson

Seafood enjoyed at the awards night was generously donated by:

- Adam Collins
- Australia Bay Seafoods
- Darwin Fish Market
- Northern Seafoods

---

NORTHERN TERRITORY SEAFOOD COUNCIL YEAR IN REVIEW 2017
The National Seafood Industry Awards celebrate the ‘best of the best’ within the Australian seafood industry. Three national winners from the Northern Territory were announced on the night in Sydney, and one long-time fisher was inducted into the National Seafood Industry Hall of Fame.

Primary Industry and Resources Minister Ken Vowles recognised the Northern Territory seafood industry’s contribution to the national industry.

“Clearly we are doing something right in the Territory – we had seven finalists and three winners in these awards,” Mr Vowles said.

Professional fisher Bill Passey of Australia Bay Seafoods was inducted into the Hall of Fame for his visionary approach and commitment to the fishing industry in the Northern Territory.

“Bill is one of the largest operators in the Northern Territory and has shown strong and strategic leadership,” Mr Vowles said. “This recognition is well-deserved.”

Frying Nemo Fish & Chippery was crowned national winner of the Take-Away Fish and Chips Award. Entrants were rated against five criteria – taste, service, choice, information and labelling. A national judge described Frying Nemo as “easily the best meal I’ve had in four visits to the Top End.”

“The eatery was up against hundreds of fish and chip shops nationwide, and the judges travelled 22,000 kilometres for tastings all over the country,” Mr Vowles said. “Everyone loves take-away fish and chips and to see a small local business beat hundreds of others is fantastic.”

The Northern Territory Seafood Council congratulates all of the Northern Territory national finalists for their achievements in developing and positively promoting Territory seafood.

Finalists
Ambassador Award – Chris Calogeras
Business Award (Small) – Monsoon Aquatics
Primary Producer Award – Australia Bay Seafoods
Restaurant Award – Saffron Restaurant

Finalists and Winners
National Seafood Industry Hall of Fame – Bill Passey
Business Award (Large) – Humpty Doo Barramundi Pty Ltd
Development Award – Australian Maritime and Fisheries Academy
Take-Away Fish and Chips – Frying Nemo Fish & Chippery

Support NT Caught
The push to support the local seafood industry by selling Northern Territory seafood continues to grow, with the following businesses joining Support NT Caught by offering fresh local seafood for consumers:

Austop Fisheries
Beachfront Hotel
Cape Adieu Harbour Cruises
Coles supermarkets
Darwin Convention Centre
Darwin Fish Market
Darwin Harbour Cruises
Fannie Bay Cool Spot
Foreshore Restaurant & Café
Frying Nemo Fish & Chippery
Gove Seafood
Hanuman
Jingili Meat and Seafood Supply
Jones Meat Mart
La Beach Fish & Chips
Mitchell’s Grill, Hilton Darwin
Mr Barra
Mr Prawn
Pee Wee’s at the Point
P.M. Eat & Drink
Pulp Kitchen
Rachael’s Seafood Shack
Saffron Restaurant
Salt n Peppa Café Ristorante
Sea Darwin
The Roma Bar
Woolworths supermarkets

The National Seafood Industry Awards celebrate the ‘best of the best’ within the Australian seafood industry. Three national winners from the Northern Territory were announced on the night in Sydney, and one long-time fisher was inducted into the National Seafood Industry Hall of Fame.

Primary Industry and Resources Minister Ken Vowles recognised the Northern Territory seafood industry’s contribution to the national industry.

“Clearly we are doing something right in the Territory – we had seven finalists and three winners in these awards,” Mr Vowles said.

Professional fisher Bill Passey of Australia Bay Seafoods was inducted into the Hall of Fame for his visionary approach and commitment to the fishing industry in the Northern Territory.

“Bill is one of the largest operators in the Northern Territory and has shown strong and strategic leadership,” Mr Vowles said. “This recognition is well-deserved.”

Frying Nemo Fish & Chippery was crowned national winner of the Take-Away Fish and Chips Award. Entrants were rated against five criteria – taste, service, choice, information and labelling. A national judge described Frying Nemo as “easily the best meal I’ve had in four visits to the Top End.”

“The eatery was up against hundreds of fish and chip shops nationwide, and the judges travelled 22,000 kilometres for tastings all over the country,” Mr Vowles said. “Everyone loves take-away fish and chips and to see a small local business beat hundreds of others is fantastic.”

The Northern Territory Seafood Council congratulates all of the Northern Territory national finalists for their achievements in developing and positively promoting Territory seafood.
Discussions about how to improve interactions between professional fishers and the community stemmed out of concerns professional fishing was impacting local seafood stocks.

In September 2017, the local North Wind Fisheries Committee sent a petition to the Chief Minister calling for professional fishing to be banned in local waters.

The petition was one of several social media campaigns calling for professional fishing to be banned in different areas of the Northern Territory.

Seafood Council Chief Executive Officer Katherine Winchester said the campaigns were the result of poor communication between the Seafood Council and residents in remote communities where professional fishing occurred.

“As recognised in our 2016 review of the Seafood Council, we haven’t been communicating and engaging well with our stakeholders and as a result we saw frustration boil over in a few communities, individuals and groups in 2017,” Ms Winchester said.

“This gave us a chance to put our new approach to communicate openly with people who have issues with the seafood industry into action, so we can work together to understand the real issues and come up with solutions, rather than call for a ban on professional fishing.”

The Seafood Council met with the North Wind Fisheries Committee to hear their concerns and as a result will look at ways the seafood industry can share the economic benefits of the Barramundi fishery such as facilities for fuel, jobs on boats or processing for residents and upskilling the community to work in the industry.

“We recognised community concerns about fish stocks after professional fishers came through, as well as fish waste and bycatch, and we were able to discuss ideas and opportunities for making fish available locally,” Ms Winchester said.

“It was sad that it took this petition and social media focus as we didn’t realise the industry was causing so much angst in the community. We respect their concerns and are committed to working through these issues together.”

Barramundi test case for building trust

The Northern Territory Seafood Council is exploring ways to address concerns raised by Maningrida residents and involve them in the local seafood industry to help build more trust and increase economic returns for local communities.
Blue Mud Bay update

Five key stakeholders involved in the Blue Mud Bay negotiations sat around one table to discuss access agreements for the first time ever in February 2017.

The Northern Land Council (NLC), Amateur Fishermen’s Association NT, NT Guided Fishing Industry Association, Northern Territory Government and Northern Territory Seafood Council formed a consultative committee that met four times in 2017 to discuss the negotiations.

The committee heard from the Sea Country Working Group, which is made up of the Traditional Owners who represent the areas in the Northern Territory where agreement is needed to access waters overlying Aboriginal land as a result of the High Court decision in 2008.

Seafood Council Chief Executive Officer Katherine Winchester said the Seafood Council was very keen to work with the NLC to help come up with solutions for access arrangements to the intertidal zone.

“Attending the NLC's Full Council meetings is helping improve relationships between the two organisations, and while there was still frustration with the lack of progress in negotiating access agreements, participants are now all on the same page and know what needs to happen,” Ms Winchester said.

As a result, the NLC extended the waiver for permits to fish in the intertidal zone for professional fishers until 31 December 2018.

“The Northern Territory seafood industry has had 10 years of uncertainty with the interim permits and the land council now appreciate the disruption this is causing the industry,” Ms Winchester said.

“Similarly, we had the opportunity to understand, through the NLC consultations, that the communities are interested in becoming more involved in the fisheries management and gaining economic benefit from fishing in their areas.”

Since 2008, seven access agreements have been formed for areas including the Tiwi Islands, Minimi/Murganella, Wadeye, Daly River, Nhulunbuy and McArthur River.

The Seafood Council recognises there is no simple solution as the negotiations are still very complex.

“What we did achieve was the extension of the interim arrangements for 12 months, rather than six months, to provide more certainty for industry,” Ms Winchester said. “We want to work with the NLC and in 2018 we have to deliver on how a long term solution can be achieved.”

Seafood Council Chair Daniel Kimberley said the Seafood industry shared the Traditional Owners’ frustration as the delay has meant the industry cannot plan, invest or grow with any certainty.

“That is why we are seeking to work directly with the NLC to reach a solution as soon as practical,” Mr Kimberley said. “We understand communities are concerned about the management of waterways, sustainable management of fisheries and about the lack of depth of Traditional Owners involvement in the industry.

“We have invited the NLC to work with us to reach a workable solution on how the commercial seafood industry accesses intertidal waters overlying aboriginal land.”

Blue Mud Bay facts

In 2008, the High Court of Australia ruled that permission is required for all commercial and recreational fishers and other water users to enter waters overlying Aboriginal land. The High Court also confirmed that the NT Fisheries Act applies in those waters.

A s19 land use agreement from the Northern Land Council is required, as provided under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act (NT) for land-based commercial activities on Aboriginal land.

The waived need for a permit does not provide access to sacred sites. A certificate of authority from the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority is required, as provided under the Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act (NT), to authorise entry to registered sacred sites.
Strategic Plan, Goals and Achievements

While the Northern Territory Seafood Council was formulating a new strategic plan, several goals from the 2014-2019 strategic plan were achieved throughout 2017.

Industry Security and investment
To secure greater natural resource certainty for the seafood industry, including legislative access and rights.
- Undertook interviews with 45 people from 21 organisations to gain improved understanding of the issues facing the Barramundi, Mud Crab and Offshore Finfish fisheries
- Ongoing engagement and participation in negotiations for professional operators in waters overlying Aboriginal land
- Took part in local Fishery Management Advisory Committees and Fishery Advisory Groups
- Hosted a seismic assessment information session

Peak Industry Voice and key policy influencer
To have greater impact on government policy and implementation.
- Completed and provided input into eight submissions and three land claims
- Appointed and participated in several national and Northern Territory forums and government committees
- Commissioned a 10-year economic analysis to capture the economic value of the Northern Territory seafood industry

Maximise industry participation, high public profile and support
To improve the support and recognition of the Seafood Council among members and stakeholders.
- Developed a member and stakeholder communication and engagement strategy
- Hosted the 2017 NT Seafood Industry Awards
- Membership to several organisations including Seafood Industry Australia, National Seafood Industry Alliance, Northern Territory Business Council, Australian Hotels Association NT and Tourism Top End

Efficient innovative and financially secure industry council
Professionalise the governance and operation of the Seafood Council and broaden and increase resource funding base.
- Implemented a new membership database management system
- Developed a new five-year strategic plan 2018–2023
- Commenced a financial revenue review
- Completed a Governance Review
- Drafted a new constitution

Professional expanded and sustainable fisheries
Encourage innovation and best principles of wild harvest fishing and aquaculture farming.
- Helped develop and finalise the Northern Territory Mud Crab Harvest Strategy

Seafood Industry Fast Facts
- Northern Territory licence holders fish from the coastline all the way to the limit of the Australian Fishing Zone, covering approximately 500,000 square kilometres of water — an area twice the size of Victoria.
- The Northern Territory seafood industry produces approximately $60 million of product each year, excluding prawns.
- Surveys show Territorians overwhelming prefer local Northern Territory seafood.
- Most Territorians rely on the Northern Territory’s professional seafood industry for their local seafood supplies.
- There is commercial activity in 15 different wild harvest fisheries, aquaculture and the trader/processor sector.
The Australian Government received a pat on the back from members of the Northern Territory Seafood Council for showing genuine effort to balance livelihoods and protect the marine environment in the revised draft.

The Seafood Council was pleased that the July 2017 revised zoning for the North Network - Commonwealth Marine Park finally took the future growth of the Northern Territory seafood industry into account.

The 2017 Draft North Network Management Plan minimised the impacts on the seafood industry significantly in comparison to the 2012 draft plan, which failed to recognise the development and growth potential of the Northern Territory seafood industry.

In addition to reducing the economic burden on the local seafood industry, the plan includes positive attributes, including identifying the need to develop:

- a mechanism for authorising commercial fishing gear not allowed in a zone after a satisfactory assessment that supports an adaptive management approach
- developing an advisory committee for the North Network to support collaborative management and achieve the vision for marine parks
- the capacity to develop management programs, including communication, education and awareness; Indigenous engagement; marine science; assessments and authorisations; marine park protection and management; and compliance.

Introducing a class approval system that recognises existing commercial fishing licences was recognised as a need to simplify and reduce regulatory burden on industry.

The North Network contains eight Australian Marine Parks off the coast of the Northern Territory and Queensland, covering a total area of 157,480 square kilometres.

**Marine parks in the North Network**
- West Cape York Marine Park
- Arnhem Marine Park
- Gulf of Carpentaria Marine Park
- Arafura Marine Park
- Limmen Marine Park
- Oceanic Shoals Marine Park
- Wessel Marine Park
- Joseph Bonaparte Gulf Marine Park
The 2017 Clean-Up saw more than 157 people and nine boats working across 15 sites on land and sea around the harbour in mid-July.

Together, the volunteers collected an estimated 4.2 tonnes of rubbish which included an estimated:

- 2375 cigarette butts and filters
- 1797 plastic food packages
- 1532 metres of fishing line
- 1032 plastic drink bottles
- 1017 aluminium cans.

The success and popularity of the event has resulted in the Darwin harbour Clean-Up removing almost 24 tonnes of rubbish from Darwin harbour since it began eight years ago in 2010.

The event raises awareness of the sources and effect of rubbish ending up in the sea and to encourage everyone to: bin it or take it with you.

All eight Darwin Harbour Clean-Ups have been organised by the Northern Territory Seafood Council and supported by Territory Natural Resource Management through Australian Government funding.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>People</th>
<th>Boats</th>
<th>Sites</th>
<th>Tonnes</th>
<th>KG/Person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>29.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>28.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>32.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>19.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Towards a sustainable mud crab fishery-stakeholder engagement and knowledge capture

The project continued to help:
- identify skills development opportunities within the fishery
- identify resources needed for successful strategic planning
- aid industry understand the need for change
- incorporate their ideas on change
- improve industry engagement in management decisions
- assist in developing a formal sustainable harvest strategy.

This project is supported by Territory Natural Resource Management through funding provided by the Australian Government’s National Landcare Programme.

2017 NT Seafood Council Membership Survey

The Northern Territory Seafood Council undertook its annual membership satisfaction survey. Feedback on business challenges faced by members saw a significant rise in concerns about access to fishing grounds, members listed it as the most prevalent business challenge facing the industry.

Identifying issues and capacity needs for three fisheries

Extensive member and user group interviews were undertaken and three reports were compiled that highlight the social licence to operate risks for the NT Barramundi, Mud Crab and Offshore Finfish Fishery. This project was supported by Territory Natural Resource Management through funding provided by the Australian Government’s National Landcare Program.

10-year economic analysis

The Northern Territory Seafood Council commissioned work to identify economic indicators for industry over the past 10 years. This work also included identifying data gaps that prevent more accurate economic analysis of the Northern Territory seafood industry.

Strategic Plan 2018–2023

Building on the knowledge gained from a review in 2016, membership surveys and interviews with stakeholders, the Seafood Council Board held workshops facilitated by Futureye to assess the key risks, opportunities and space the Northern Territory Seafood Council needs to be in.

The workshops formed the basis of a new strategic direction set to rebuild trust, and to earn and maintain social licence for the Northern Territory seafood industry. This work was supported by the Department of Business, Innovation and Trade through funding from the Northern Territory Government’s Business Growth program.

Modernising the Seafood Council

In August, member feedback was received on the proposed new Board and Licensee Committee structure. The feedback was used to complete a Northern Territory Seafood Council Governance Review and immediate work went into developing amendments to the Constitution to enable the necessary changes. This work was supported by the Department of Business, Innovation and Trade through funding from the Northern Territory Government’s Business Growth program.

Financial Revenue Review

Late in the year the Northern Territory Seafood Council began a review of revenue streams to better secure the funds and capacity required to implement the new 2018–2023 Strategic Plan. This project is supported by the Department of Business, Innovation and Trade through funding from the Northern Territory Government’s Business Growth program.
NT Mud Crab Licensee Committee
Chair: Chris Calogeras

What a difference a year makes. Driven by a series of record low rainfall wet seasons this time last year, the fishery recorded its lowest catch in almost a generation and we were hoping for a good wet season to help the fishery bounce back in 2017. Twelve months later, after a solid wet, catches are back up to about 300 tonnes – the highest since 2012.

However, we didn’t twiddle our thumbs during 2017. Industry worked with other user groups and the Northern Territory Government to develop a Mud Crab Harvest Strategy, which is now in the process of being legislated. This strategy provides guidance on appropriate management actions to implement if there are significant changes in stock abundance or catch rates in the future. The Mud Crab Harvest Strategy is the first of its kind to be developed in the Northern Territory and provides certainty for industry and other user groups that, if needed, science-based adjustments can be applied to all sectors to adjust fishing pressure. The strategy isn’t formally in place until 2018, so industry decided to adopt the agreed measures voluntarily, if required. The good news was due to improved catch performance this year, it did not trigger any of the industry supported management actions, so there was no impact on operations arising from the harvest strategy.

Trepang Licensee Committee
Chair: Chauncey Hammond

The Trepang Fishery licence holder operated two vessels for most of 2017. Catches were steady and stocks healthy.

One of the vessels, FV Grace 1, has an Indigenous skipper and crew. As far as Tasmanian Seafoods Pty Ltd is aware, this is the first Northern Territory commercial fishing vessel fully run and operated by an Indigenous skipper and crew.

Tasmanian Seafoods received a commercial sea ranching licence and is continuing to consult with coastal Traditional Owner communities regarding projects in 2017 and beyond. Tasmanian Seafoods has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with one Traditional Owner community and is in advanced discussions with another community.

It is important to note that more than 90 per cent of all Trepang harvested in the Northern Territory is from outside of the intertidal zone.
Aquarium Licensee Committee
Chair: Daniel Kimberley

The Aquarium Fishery continues to have low uptake of Northern Territory Seafood Council voluntary members, with only three active members in the fishery.

The 2017 licence year saw the fishery exceed trigger points in some coral species. This has again highlighted the need for all operators to return log books to NT Fisheries in a more timely manner.

It is recognised that collecting and supplying solid data to back up requests for an increase in limits is needed.

NT Fisheries have advised there is a lack of data to assist in planning and implementing a harvest strategy in the future. A major focus for the next two years will be to source and supply supporting data to NT Fisheries.

NT Fisheries have begun providing equipment for divers to film transects for research. Footage collected can be analysed to gather information on what species are present in Northern Territory waterways and their approximate population sizes.

Current licence holders continue to supply the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation funded research project with live coral to help collect data.

Offshore Net and Line Licensee Committee
Chair: Anthony Ciconte

Following the formation of a new look committee earlier in the year, the fishery has significantly progressed in its efforts to restructure.

The committee’s three key focus areas are:

- for the Offshore Net and Line Fishery (ONLF) to maintain World Trade Organisation approval to export
- to progress implementing a detailed and modern harvest strategy policy and an output controlled quota system
- to improve participation and profitability in the fishery.

I am delighted in the progress and want to give particular thanks to Chris Calogeras, who stepped down from the Chair role this year but continued to support the Licensee Committee to get these changes in place. I would also like to thank David McKey and Thor Saunders from the Department of Primary Industry and Resources. Thanks also to the rest of the team that worked efficiently to get the Offshore Net and Line Fishery to the stage where the World Trade Organisation export approval extension was granted. Thank you also for preparing the fishery for the imminent allocation of quota as a first step to implementing a modern harvest strategy policy.

As a final step, once the fishery has the secure access rights allocated, the Offshore Net and Line Fishery will pursue and encourage participation in the harvesting opportunity that awaits. It is exciting to be a part of developing this fishery.

Aquaculture Licensee Committee
Chair: Dan Richards

The Aquaculture Committee met several times this year to engage more closely with the Darwin Aquaculture Centre and gain a better understanding of their policies and roles.

Barramundi, Giant Clam and Trepang aquaculture are all continuing to develop strongly with single operators in each species.

Project Sea Dragon is still moving through the planning phase after securing several key approvals.
Barramundi Licensee Committee
Chair: Jeff Newman

The 2017 Barramundi season has been up and down, with good rainfall in most areas starting the season off well and good catches reported right across nearly all fishing areas.

The Gulf of Carpentaria did not see as much rain and fishing was a little down through that area. Overall, most fishers have reported a good season.

The downside is there has been several community groups calling for more restrictions to commercial Barramundi fishing. With only approximately 10 per cent of the viable fishing area currently available to Barramundi fishers, any further reduction would be destructive to the continued profitability of the industry.

Representatives of the industry will continue to have discussions with these groups to address their concerns and work together towards a viable industry for the future.

The future looks bright for the fishery as consumer demand for wild caught Barramundi remains high and so does the Northern Territory Government’s support of the industry.

There has been further development within the marine ranger program to train rangers to be more qualified in fisheries research and data collection. This will add to the information NT Fisheries collects.

The opportunity for Indigenous people to enter the Barramundi industry is encouraged and hopefully we will see more communities obtain fishing licences in the near future.

Due to the ongoing Blue Mud Bay negotiations, any progress with development and operational changes to the fishery has been put on hold due to the uncertainty of the access agreements.

Pearling Licensee Committee
Chair: Tony Thiel

2017 was another steady year in the Northern Territory pearling industry.

No pearl oysters were collected from the wild fishery again in 2017. Quota holders continued to seed hatchery produced oysters to fill their Northern Territory quota allocation.

The production environment and the markets we operate in remain quite stable. The outlook for 2018 looks steady.

Spanish Mackerel Licensee Committee
Chair: Peter Manning

The 2017 Spanish Mackerel season has been hailed as a successful year, with all 15 licences continuing to be active, which is great to see.

It was fantastic to see an increase in consumer demand for both frozen fillets and fresh trunks on ice throughout the year. Seeing this demand has positively contributed to how active the fishery has been, and even better, is the rise in prices.

It is great to see local seafood lovers enjoying and supporting Northern Territory seafood and businesses.
NT Coastal Line Fishermen’s Association
Chair: Grant Rubock

The newly re-formed Coastal Line Fishery Management Advisory Committee met for the first time in December 2017 and I am excited to be appointed a member of the committee to provide an industry voice for current management priorities for the fishery.

I must thank all the members for attending the Annual General Meeting and the General Meeting which saw my re-election as Chairman of the Coastal Line Fishermen’s Association. I’d like to congratulate Cam Druitt on being appointed Vice Chairman and acknowledge the support the Association received from Northern Territory Seafood Council’s Chairman Daniel Kimberley. Daniel’s contribution in providing members with an outline of the Seafood Council’s new strategic direction and an update on Blue Mud Bay negotiations was valuable.

It was great to see high attendance to meetings in 2017 and hear some good robust discussions. I encourage all members to continue reading correspondence that is circulated and provide feedback and ideas.

Following on from the 2016 season and management changes in 2015, this year continued to have very little activity in the Eastern Zone and I still see fishery members being wary and disillusioned.

Earlier in the year the Coastal Line Fishermen’s Association wrote to NT Fisheries showing its support for introducing authentication tags to all professional fisheries that harvest Black Jewfish to eliminate loopholes in the traceability of swim bladders.

From 1 September this year, authentication tags were introduced to commercially harvested Black Jewfish swim bladders. It was great to see the Seafood Council acknowledge the Black Jewfish sustainability concerns and seek support from the Minister for Primary Industries and Resources for action in the recreational and fishing tour operator sector.

On a final note, product demand has been good and from the update provided by NT Fisheries, Black Jewfish stocks are showing signs of recovery and increased rainfalls appear to have a positive influence.

Coastal Net Licensee Committee
Chair: David Baumber

Coastal Net Licence holders are feeling extremely positive about the transferability of licences since being introduced mid-2016.

Following the announcement of the 12-month waiver for permits allowing access for professional fishers to the intertidal zone, the Blue Mud Bay negotiations continue to raise concerns and frustrations. Coastal fishers feel access certainty is still not any clearer.

We have seen a substantial increase in the shark population, which is making fishing very difficult at times.

Catch rates were down from the 2016 season as good rainfall is not particularly favourable when fishing for Mullet and Whiting. Despite lower catches this year, demand for fresh quality affordable fish from locals was still evident.

It remains disappointing that bait shops continue to support imported product over locally caught seafood.
NT Demersal Fishermen’s Association
Chair: Rob Fish

The Demersal Fishery continued to perform in 2017 with volumes continuing to grow.

Working with the Timor Reef Licensee Committee the NT Demersal Fishermen’s Association has contributed towards developing a Harvest Strategy, Ecological Risk Assessment and Social and Economic Risk assessments.

The revised Commonwealth Marine Park maps that were released this year were a significant relief to industry as it finally recognised prospectivity for the fishery.

Through the social licence risk assessment and work with the Seafood Council it was recognised that there are difficulties in building and implementing a practical vision for the fishery that connects key user groups in a way that brings clear economic and sustainable outcomes with meaningful business certainty.

NT Timor Reef Licensee Committee
Chair: Horst Fischer

The main focus for the Timor Reef fishery in 2017 was completing the offshore finfish harvest strategy and developing a relevant management framework.

This framework is being developed for both the Timor Reef and the Demersal Fishery together. Our focus has been to ensure the framework has the tools to meet fishery objectives and ensure the fishery is managed consistently with the harvest strategy.

An Independent Ecological Risk Assessment was completed on the fishery, as were Social and Economic Risk assessments. We worked closely with government on a social licence risk assessment to inform social risk assessment process.

A draft harvest strategy was provided to CSIRO for independent review and recommendations are being implemented into the strategy with final sign off expected in early 2018. This will include a direct engagement process with all key user groups. The harvest strategy contains target reference points, monitoring requirements, stock assessment and decision rules and these will then be empowered through a Management Framework and Fishery Management Plan.

Through the social license risk assessment and work with the Seafood Council it was recognised that there are difficulties in building and implementing a practical vision for the fishery that connects key user groups in a way that brings clear economic and sustainable outcomes with meaningful business certainty.

The Seafood Council has developed a strategy and implementation plan to refocus Seafood Council to address these challenges. A series of user group interviews were conducted to better understand key concerns about the Timor Reef and Demersal Fisheries. The aim is to develop a long term vision for the fishery that is supported by all sectors. This plan will position the fishery as an economically viable, sustainable and respected fishery meeting all sectors’ aspirations.

Industry will meet early in the new year to consider a report and recommendations on emerging issues and opportunities identified through extensive user group engagement.

This improved engagement and governance would allow the fishery to make the important steps towards co-management ensure industry unity, stakeholder and community support.
NTSC Board and Staff Structure as at December 2017

Chairman:
Daniel Kimberley

Vice Chairman:
Anthony Ciconte

Secretary:
Dan Richards

Treasurer:
Bill Passey

Members:
Chauncey Hammond
Horst Fischer
Chris Calogeras
Jeff Newman
Peter Manning
Dan Richards
David Baumber
Rob Fish
Grant Rubock
Tony Thiel

Staff

CEO:
Katherine Winchester

Promotions and Marketing Officer:
Donna English
Offshore Net and Line Fishery

Biagio and Nina Spinella

When you think of the Northern Territory’s most iconic fish, people automatically think of the big Barramundi. But for Nina and Biagio Spinella from Austop Fisheries, their signature Territory fish is the petite Sardine.

Coming from a long line of fishermen, Biagio’s father was born in the Sicilian fishing village of Oliveri. He remembers the stories his father told of his time in the village before migrating to Australia in 1962.

“They would fish off the coast with mesh netting and lines, everything was done by hand and the whole village survived off it,” Biagio said. “A lot of the early fishermen in Darwin came from that village – my uncle was first and then my Dad.”

**Born in Darwin, fishing is in Biagio’s blood – even his first word was ‘fish’.”**

So, it seemed natural to continue the family tradition and start his own company with his wife Nina. Austop Fisheries primarily harvests Grey Mackerel but after discovering masses of small pelagic fish, they diversified and explored the possibility of harvesting and distributing Sardines.

“It takes us about one year to catch 100 tonnes of Grey Mackerel per boat, whereas we can harvest 40-50 tonnes of small pelagic fish in a week,” Biagio said. “We only do one or two trips a year because there are difficulties with the value of the product and the viability of the operation.

“We are the only ones in Darwin who harvest Sardines. The Northern Territory is our main market and locals can find our sardines right here at Fisherman’s Wharf, but a lot of people don’t know we have them. They are mostly fished down south so people don’t recognise them as a Territory fish.”

Austop supply their products to fish markets around Australia and local restaurants like PM Eat & Drink, Rachael’s Seafood Shack, Frying Nemo and Spice Garden, to name a few, but the trade is limited by international imports.

“Imports really impact our business – Australians do want to eat local seafood but sometimes the price difference of imported seafood gets in the way,” Nina said. “We could be harvesting a lot more Sardines than we currently do, but we also want to be sustainable.”

“Fishing is our life, we need to have a tomorrow and so do future generations.”

Despite the concerns and issues faced by the local fishing industry, the Spinellas are passionate about what they do and would not change anything.

“We are proud of what we do, we are local, our product is local, and the product is organic,” Nina said. “At the end of the day, its real food, there are no chemicals, preservatives or additives.”

**Nina and Biagio passed these passions and the family tradition onto their three daughters from a young age.**

“The first time I went out on the boats with Biagio, I had a 12-month-old daughter and it was amazing!” Nina said. “It’s an experience you cannot imagine until you have had the opportunity to do it. Whenever we got the chance during school holidays or Christmas, we would all go out to sea together. The girls got to see things other kids couldn’t. They got to appreciate the hard work that goes into harvesting the food we all eat.”

**Biagio had his own fond memories of having the girls out on the boat when they were young.**

“Because we fish at night, during the day I would anchor the boat and teach the girls to fish and they loved it,” he said. “At night, they would watch me cast the first nets before going to bed. Then I would work all night and they got to see me harvesting the fish when they woke up.

“Commercial fishing is hard work but I would never do anything else. I am a qualified refrigeration mechanic too but I love fishing and love that we not only supply the Territory, but we also get to send our products down south and showcase the range of amazing seafood the Territory has to offer.”