

13 January 2012

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT
AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS
Attention Tim Watling - Secretary
Via on line submission

Dear Senate Committee

**Inquiry into meeting the education and skills requirements for the agriculture sector
in Australia**

Thank you for this opportunity to make this submission.

Background - SEA

Seafood Experience Australia (SEA) was launched in December 2005, with the aim of becoming the first industry-owned corporation formed to specifically promote Australian seafood to consumers both in Australia and overseas.

Many sectors of the seafood industry are facing serious profitability issues. Statistics demonstrate that seafood, in general, is not achieving an equitable share of Australia's overall protein consumption.

Competitive protein sources, such as beef, chicken or pork, have been strongly promoting their product as a unified force for many years, resulting in increased market performance, while the Seafood Industry has done nothing.

We are about increasing demand for seafood in Australia and Australian seafood internationally by achieving greater demand supply tension, with maximising returns to the harvester.

Domestically, the potential is huge because Australians currently, on average, eat only three seafood meals a month at home. Increase this to the quantity of 2 per week, as mentioned by everyone who knows about and you've lifted the health levels of every Australian and given them the chance to avoid all chronic diseases.

There are two members of our Board who are on the Seafood Standing Committee of AgriFood Skills Australia and we are the only organisation from the seafood industry that has a MOU with AgriFood Skills Australia.

Background – Seafood and Training

Seafood was one of the last industries to have its own Training Package (SITP) – it was launched in 2000. Senator Scullion, then Chairman, Australian Seafood Industry Council (now defunct) was a major driver of the training opportunity. Our CEO was a member of the seafood industry group that created the SITP and recalls strongly how the industry was promised funding to create resources for the Package only to have the funding withdrawn. He also recalls being asked back in the early days of the Package how we could improve training and said then “adopt the same system as New Zealand” and was told by the Department person at the time “over his dead body”.

Seafood, generally speaking, is a nil entry level employer. Skippers need to have qualifications but apart from that the industry has not adapted well to the process of training.

**Seafood
Experience
Australia Limited**
ABN 16 118 344 077
www.australianseafood.com.au

Chairman
Dr Ron Edwards

Chief Executive Officer
Roy Palmer
2312/ 80 Clarendon Street
Southbank
Victoria 3006
Australia

Postal Address
Secretary
GPO Box 821
Hobart
Tasmania 7001
Australia
E

SEA@australianseafood.com.au

The exception to this is in Aquaculture – the bright light which is probably engaging 75% or more of the training that is going on in the industry. Through a small number of dedicated trainers/educators Aquaculture drives the AquaEd program which is a mini-conference held every two years either before or after Australasian Aquaculture (this year will be 5&6 May). It creates the opportunity for all likeminded people engaged in training/education/workforce development to get together and discuss what is happening and how we can work collaboratively and continue to push a skills agenda. Generally the leadership of the industry has never seen training as having the importance that it needs and consequently always falls to the bottom of the Agendas. There are exceptions of course. AgriFood Skills, who now control the SITP, have a Standing Committee but regrettably its successes have been few and whilst there are some willing and capable people engaged it has been starved of resources to the point that agendas of meetings only come out with a day or so of the meetings and minutes are hard to obtain (e.g meeting held 10 Nov 2011 has still not had minutes passed onto the committee). Fisheries Research & Development Corporation has a People Development Program which tends to work in isolation of AgriFood Skills. We believe there is no room for two committees without much liaison and there should be one committee to handle both areas.

Additionally when the Australian Seafood Cooperative Research Centre was established it had a program approved which was going to revolutionise workforce development in the industry. This was acknowledged right through the bid process. When the Centre was approved and the board appointed the strategy changed. In the bid process it was accepted that there would not be research funds approved to any project unless there was a training plan included in the project ensuring that the research would not sit in the library but be part of the grass-roots activity and actually create benefit. As a result of the diminished training involvement originally planned we are not seeing anything revolutionary happening. It must be noted that the Seafood CRC is not the industry – it is a company with membership of some seafood companies so will be driven by its membership base rather than what the whole of industry needs.

Occupational shortages in the professional fishing industry are a result of an ageing demographic within the industry with very few young people entering the fishing industry combined with the perception that the work is insecure, physically demanding and provides unattractive working conditions. In addition, the work is often seasonal and casual and due to the industry's individual approach to fishing is also anti-union. Predominantly, occupations within the fishing industry have not required formal qualifications and are labour intensive. New AMSA regulations may see this change with requirements for intensive training courses before people can step on a boat.

The fishing industry is struggling to compete with the higher paying, similarly physically demanding opportunities being offered by the mining, oil and resources sectors.

The increasing demand for environmental, food safety and certification requirements has placed greater need for technically qualified occupations within the industry.

Enrolments within all education sectors have decreased considerably and less and less RTO's, and Educational organisations are showing interest in including seafood educational items on their agendas. The difficulty with labour has seen the industry, particularly the processors, addressing these occupational shortages through increasing efficiencies through investment in capital, particularly machinery and equipment. This investment will introduce demand for new skill sets including more highly qualified and experienced personnel like engineers and specialists in activities such as Modified Air Packaging. The lack of people willing and able to work in the seafood industry threatens the viability of the sector into the future and constrains future growth.

Shortages of labour in regional and rural Australia could see that the value adding component of the industry be relocated closer to major city hubs. This will be a significant loss to the rural and regional economy and community.

In answering the issues you are investigating we, of course, refer only to the seafood industry, however we would believe that many agri-food industry groups would probably have similar issues/comments.

The adequacy of funding and priority given by governments at the federal, state and territory level to agriculture and agribusiness higher education and vocational education and training;

- Can anyone tell us what the Framework is for Training/Workforce development in Seafood? If you cannot explain this in one sentence then clearly whatever funding is going in is absolutely wasted. No one has been able to do this to date and without such a strategy issues simply go round and round. We understand there is consideration of Skills Formation Strategies across the various sectors of agrifood – which would sit under a National Agrifood Skills and Workforce Development Strategy which cuts across a lot of the common issues. Whilst we encourage this consideration it is essential that any new strategy deals with a lot of the bigger policy blockages, sum of the parts and all that to break through a few of the enduring issues eg. skill sets, establishing inter and intra occupational pathways across sectors to make primary industries viable.
- The current system is not delivering – it is flawed in so many ways.
- Once there is a National Framework for Seafood Training where all activities/functions from school to VET to higher education are listed and aligned to actual jobs in the seafood industry it would then be possible to prioritise and then government and organisations with funding could apply those funds in a manner that would have meaning and would ensure that the public's money is not wasted.
- In many instances full qualifications are not required – skill sets are. There seems to be a major reluctance by the Government to accept this is the predominant learning culture within seafood and many primary sectors. It is important for policy makers to comprehend that trying to shoehorn an industry into full qualifications when they are often seasonal, casual or part-time is ill-conceived and simply results in zero engagement in formal training.
- In the area of higher education generally speaking we believe that there is a lack of understanding about the industry's needs. This is not an easy task but we would suggest more time needs to be spent 'in the business' rather than 'in the classroom'. The Seafood CRC has gone some way to achieving this with their PhD program but there are clearly massive gaps and no cohesion nationally. Getting industry, research and academia focussed on the real issues is not an easy task but the focus should be on industry and that currently is not the case.
- Every government (federal and states/territory) attacks the issue differently – so much is wasted in time, resources and funding through the current approach. To be successful a national approach needs to be adopted through an agreed Framework with all relevant parties contributing.

The reasons and impacts of the decline in agricultural and related educational facilities;

- There is no framework where all Governments and industry can understand where we stand, what the priorities are and how we will fund them.
- Governments change regulations but do not engage the industry by means of utilising the SITP. An example of this is given in Appendix 1 which is one-pager we presented to the WA Minister of Fisheries and his Chief of Staff. We have followed up but not received any encouraging signs that anything will be done. Compliance aligned to SITP would enable Governments to ensure compliance, industry to achieve compliance, employees to understand compliance – not following this process is a missed opportunity in our mind. Everyone in the system is not thinking 'SITP' so it simply does not get moving – if it was top of mind then things could well be different.
- As governments wheel out new policy (and ideally in the policy formation stage) there should be a skills and workforce impact statement undertaken. Too often policies/ regulation is enacted with considerable implications but little if any cross agency collaboration to ensure the training system backs up. This is something that is done with issues such as environmental impact statements or regulatory impact statements.

Solutions to address the widening gap between skilled agricultural labour supply and demand;

- Do Governments really understand the system? We have been involved in DAFF Committees where there was no understanding that we actually had the SITP and they were trying to re-invent something else which would have been in contradiction to the SITP.

- Grass roots industry people certainly do not understand the system. It is far too complicated to explain. There needs to be a simple process to engage.
- If the above two dot points are correct then does that highlight the problem?
- The system needs to be changed and we suggest that as far as the seafood industry is concerned that we look at the New Zealand system. It works as well as any in the world. We do have a great SITP so the investment in that by Government and Industry has been well worthwhile.
- Funding for research needs to be aligned with training/workforce development. How many books are sitting on shelves of research projects which have not been adopted into grass-roots industry practices? Can we afford for this to continue? Market research is an absolute waste of time and money unless there is funding to promote it and to act upon it.
- With the Federal Government seemingly being ultra-keen to bring professional fishing to its knees by becoming the world's leading player in No-Go Marine Parks and having no vision whatsoever for the sustainable utilisation of the oceans we believe it is unlikely to entice young people into the system. Clearly the Government is forecasting a bleak outlook for the fishing industry, yet it continues to prop up ailing manufacturing industries. With this scenario how does the industry promote to young people?
- A negative industry image can be created for many reasons including: a perception that there is no career path; a view that manual, physical or dirty work is inferior to office-based work; parents, teachers and/or peers discouraging people entering the industry; and the experience of a previous generation, such as widespread redundancies (read buy-outs as far as fishing is concerned) within an industry; and the a history of high rates of industry accidents and illnesses (professional fishing is one of the most dangerous jobs you can have).
- Where do you get information about careers in seafood? Since the demise of Seafood Training Australia (started under the watch of Senator Scullion) through AgriFood Skills and many of the industry fishing industry organisations closing down their training activities (lack of leadership and vision). SEA is willing and prepared to be that 'one-stop shop' subject to it being allocated adequate funding and on the understanding that it will be a strong focussed web based facility. SEA is about promotion and marketing and within that we are adamant that the industry cannot move forward unless the whole chain starts lifting its skills and development levels. In the spirit of ensuring we are promoting and marketing the best that Australia can deliver we see Training/Skills and Workforce development as being essential to our role.
- The chance to promote any agrifood industry starts at school. No one has a 'handle' on this nationally – there are no doubt good things happening but they are generally happening because of individuals and not because they are part of a nationally structured strategy.
- This is an example of one activity being organised by SeaNet/Oceanwatch in Tasmania. Seafood Industry Partnerships in Schools - A pilot collaborative program between the fishing industry and educators. The "Seafood Industry Partnerships in Schools" (SIPS) program is an exciting new concept for Tasmania involving creating educational partnerships between the seafood industry and educators of children from Kinder to year 10. There are two streams to the program; "Adopt a Fishing Boat" and "Adopt a Marine Farm". It's envisaged that the program will be a collaborative effort between the fishing industry and educators, whereby a class adopts a commercial working fishing boat, or a marine farm and the skipper/marine farmer adopts the class. By partnering with a class, fishermen and marine farmers help to educate students about the marine environment, complexities of marine resource utilisation, and the daily life of a commercial fisherman or marine farmer. The program is designed to be self-administered and dependent on class age, needs, individual teacher preferences and the level of commitment the fisherman/marine farmer is able to make. Partnerships can last from one day to an entire school year. (see <http://www.oceanwatch.org.au/seanet/seanet-programs-by-state/seanet-tasmania/>).
- We noticed this article on 26 December 2011 - <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/state-schools-to-offer-more-choice-20111225-1p9m9.html> - State schools to offer more choice -

Twelve government schools will specialise in areas from aviation to Mandarin next year under a Baillieu (Victorian) government push to improve choice in the public system. One of the schools listed was going to do Marine Biology (Warrnambool East PS), two were going to do Science and Environmental Sustainability (Glen Katherine PS & Warringah Park School) and another two were going to do Agriculture & Environment (Kaniva College & Murrayville Community College). What is important is that there is a connection to the 'real world of the industry' connecting to this and some national consistency in the program and curriculum. We are not sure that will happen under the current arrangements.

- The Seafood Skills Formation Strategy is a partnership initiative between the Queensland Government and the fishing industry. It has been allocated funding for 2 years. One of its earliest actions was to 'examine what other jurisdictions are doing in terms of training for commercial fishers.' Do you appreciate that here we are some 11 years into having the SITP and we still do not have a register of what is happening in all jurisdictions and as a result time and resources are wasted. Other things this group are doing e.g. mapping career paths, exploring Training Needs Analysis (TNA), viewing Master Fisherman's licence to examine its fit within existing qualifications, etc all fall into the same category. This was all reported in 'Queensland Seafood' in 2011. This is not necessarily a dig at Queensland or the Project Manager but it highlights the lack of a National Framework. We believe translating this type of initiative to a national level, ensuring it is sufficiently funded and engaging whole of industry could be the breakthrough strategy. It does need industry leadership though and it is has to be acknowledged that seafood will be a hard road to travel.
- One of the reasons it is a hard road is the continual approach in funding training opportunities which are not linked in any way to the SITP. Surely every time this happens it undermines the Program. It needs a discipline by all organisations, government and private to stick to the principles of SITP.

The impacts of any shortage on agricultural research:

- As we have no national Framework do we know where we have riches and where we have gaps in research?
- There is a massive shortage of funding the plans that have been researched – training is no different.
- We note there is a lack of pupils prepared to take on science activities and so this may become an issue.
- The work that PICSE (we assume you are aware of PICSE as they spent some time promoting their concept in Parliament last year) are doing needs to be supported in this regard.
- Where is Australia? Clearly the hunter gathering aspects of fishing have a future although this we understand will be limited. We do control the world's 3rd largest EEZ and not to utilise this would be total mismanagement.

The Global Blue Revolution has an estimated global market of US\$ 175 Billion and still growing:-

Aquaculture represents 49% of total marine harvest (\$100 Billion) and 2% of the global animal protein market

Marine Biotechnology represents only 6% of the actual Biotechnology market

Marine Cleantech represents only 15% of the actual cleantech market

Marine Nutraceuticals account for 33% of the nutraceuticals global market

Marine Bio energies represent 1% max of the energy market

Marine Cosmetics represent only 12% of the cosmetics market

Marine Pharmaceuticals account for no more than 3% of the actual market

So looking to the future and our involvement in what the Oceans offer us what are our plans because we are not seeing the vision and leadership about how Australia will be connecting and maximising the opportunities that we clearly have.

The economic impacts of labour shortages on Australia's export oriented agricultural industries:

- It is difficult to be 'export orientated' when our dollar is strong and our Foreign Affairs and Trade Departments have failed to deliver to our industry what our NZ counterparts have – free trade agreements with China and EU for seafood. Austrade also operates like a private business instead of publicly funded organisation - whereas they used to (like Trade & industry NZ still does) be in position to offer 'free' advice everything now is charged at 'consultants' rates. Our exporters also have to pay 100pct on all export charges (AQIS) whereas many of our competitors get assistance from their governments to be engaged in exporting and promoting their countries. We have lost the plot in respect of supporting export oriented agricultural industries!
- Outcome 1 of DAFF Planned Outcomes is "More sustainable, productive, internationally competitive and profitable Australian agricultural, food and fibre industries through policies and initiatives that promote better resource management practices, innovation, self-reliance and improved access to international markets." From a seafood industry perspective DAFF have failed miserably and we question – is the reason because no where do we see any comments about ensuring we are going to increase the capability and capacity of the industry through workforce development strategies?
"To achieve our planned outcomes, the department is active throughout the entire supply chain, from producer to consumer." Highlights the website <http://www.daff.gov.au/about/what-we-do> - this has one from being a department the industry could rely on to one which has gone missing in action.
Leaders at DAFF should be taken to task over this abject failure.

The incorporation of animal welfare principles in agriculture education; and other related matters.

- Our SITP has always had animal welfare principles and covers rare and endangered species
- We have other priorities in training needs – we highlight each year in a document "Environmental Scan – from AgriFood Skills".
- We believe this will be driven through Certification requirements and as long as they are linked with SITP this will enable continuous improvement and meeting of world's best standards.

Yours sincerely

Roy Palmer FAICD
Chief Executive Officer

Appendix 1 attached

APPENDIX 1

Rocklobster Industry Workforce Development

Background

For many years the WA Rocklobster industry has been managed based on input control processes but in order to better sustainably manage the resource there has been a change to quotas/ITQ management. This change needs different organisation by the industry for many reasons. No specific training has been organised to assist the industry come to grips with these new management plans.

Need

From our workshop/seminar in Geraldton on 7 November it became obvious that there was a gap in the understanding of the fishermen about what could now be possible under ITQ system as against the previous management processes. With ITQ's there is a major need in understanding the marketing opportunities and working to maximize the catch at a time the market is needing the product – the fisherman are in more control but unless they plan accordingly the opportunity to maximize the value of their catch for the community is lost.

Plans

A training program which would aim to inform the fishers and their businesses, aligned through the Industry Training Package enabling them to get either a recognised qualification or a certificate of attainment (aimed to assist the culture change through training). Challenger TAFE would be contacted to be the official Registered Training Organiser (RTO) but it is unlikely they will have the expertise to actually manage the course. It is recognised that this will be done by specialists who would need to be brought in. These specialists would be approved by Challenger and as a result of this Challenger would be able to do the assessment and issuance of Certificates.

ITQ Management, Community Responsibilities, Marketing (extending the business from end of wharf to consumer), understanding of processing, health issues, hospitality industry, etc would all be covered.

In addition delegations to various markets would be part of the process understanding how their competitors operate, seeing firsthand the pathway to market, meeting buyers and understanding their needs

Outcomes

- More informed enlightened industry
- Better understanding of the need to change the culture relating to training/workforce development
- Potential for Department personnel to be included in the training and that has potential of creating a bridge of understanding
- Increasing capacity and capability within the industry
- Report on program to be developed and used as Case Study

Recommendations

- SEA be engaged to create the concept of a Skill Set relevant to this issue
- SEA would communicate with government, industry and RTO's to ensure this covered all relevant issues