ABC

HD **Salt Water Future**

BY Sean Murphy

WC 3,304 words

PD 11 October 2014

SN Australian Broadcasting Corporation Transcripts

SC ABCTRS

LA English

LP

PIP COURTNEY, PRESENTER: Australia's Barramundi Farmers Association is investigating mounting a campaign to force foreign-grown barramundi to be called something else.

Taking a lead from French **wine** producers, who've made generic **wine** style descriptions like "champagne" exclusive to their own country, the association says an appellation case would strengthen its push for country-of-origin labels on all seafood **sold** in Australia.

TD

The move to counter increasing imports of barramundi comes as the WA Government proclaims a new aquaculture zone in the Kimberley region, which could also provide a huge lift to three nearby Aboriginal communities.

SEAN MURPHY, REPORTER: It's a Kimberley muster with a difference. At remote Cone Bay, north of Derby, they're harvesting 18 tonnes of barramundi. Within four days, it'll be transported thousands of kilometres by sea and road to Australia's major metropolitan markets.

Perth-based Marine Produce Australia has invested $50 **million** in the venture over the last eight years, but it won't make its first profit for another two years. Cone Bay's massive tidal movement of up to 11 metres every day makes it ideal for aquaculture because any waste is swept away. But the location has also been challenging.

DESIREE ALLEN, MARINE PRODUCE AUSTRALIA: A lot of research and development has gone into it. The sea cages, putting sea cages in that high tidal environment, anchoring systems are all sort of newly-developed up there. Incredible amount of work has gone in. The logistics of getting the fish out fresh and trucked across the country from there has taken some doing, but we've really nailed that one.

And then of course the cages themselves, the fish, bringing fingerlings out to that environment, and of course then there's the fauna as well, the crocodiles and the sharks. It's a bit different to the experienced people that come up from Tasmania who have seal problems and we introduce them to crocodiles and it's a whole different ball game.

SEAN MURPHY: Operations manager Adrian Heath was a diver in the Tasmanian salmon industry for 13 years.

ADRIAN HEATH, OPERATIONS MANAGER: Probably the biggest difference here is obviously water temperature and ambient temperature and the tides. So, down there we're dealing with a couple of metre tides, up here you've got up to 11-metre tides, and basically everything you do, every operation, is depending on that tide, if you're going to tow a cage or feeding, net cleaning, even diving, you've got to work around the tides. ...

We have quite a lot of species of sharks around and crocodiles and the divers dive the cages every day of the year to remove any dead fish just to stop those predators being attracted to them and ripping holes in our nets. We run double nets. So we've got a predator net around the outside of our fish nets. On the smaller fish we sometimes run another net on the inside called a liner, so we've got a couple of layers there to protect them.

SEAN MURPHY: The Cone Bay barramundi are bred in Melbourne and then flown to an interim hatchery at the Challenger Institute of Technology in Fremantle. They spend about two weeks here before being road-freighted nearly 3,000 kilometres to Derby and then shipped by sea to Cone Bay.

So, having to travel such vast distances, they must be pretty hardy.

GREG JENKINS, CHALLENGER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY: They're incredibly hardy. It's interesting because fish can be categorised depending on where they live for aquaculture.

So, something like the barramundi lives in an estuary. It can be dirty water, it can be clear water, it can be freshwater, saltwater, it can have high DO or low dissolved oxygen. And so, they're a hardy fish. They tolerate a wide range of circumstances.

And in the hatchery it means that you can get relatively high survival from egg, first-hatched egg up to juvenile and we get about 60 per cent survival. And then when you move slightly offshore, like a snapper, a near-shore species, it's not quite as harsh environment, but still, it does change, we'll get about 40 per cent survival in the hatchery, and then when you go to a more pristine open ocean species like the kingfish, we get about 10 or 15 per cent.

SEAN MURPHY: Barramundi are also among the most efficient feed converters of any farmed fish, producing about a kilogram of mass for every 1.4 kilograms of feed.

ADRIAN HEATH: They eat a specially prepared fish food that comes from Skretting in Tasmania and it's a mixture of carbohydrates, protein. So it's got animal fats, fish oil, fishmeal in it - are the main ingredients. So they've got a camera set at about six metres, and if we see pellets come past the camera, we stop the feed because we know that the fish are feeding in the top few metres, so we just stop the feed to prevent feed wastage.

SEAN MURPHY: It takes about two years for the barramundi to reach their four kilogram target weight, a size ideal for the food service industry and restaurants.

PETER MANIFIS, CHEF: It's all about portion control and not as much wastage and with smaller-sized fish, you find that you have to start cutting pieces in half and putting two bits together to get a portion. I'll probably usually get around 12 to 14 portions out of a fillet because I do an 80 gram piece.

SEAN MURPHY: Perth chef Peter Manifis reckons Cone Bay's huge tides mean the barramundi have to swim hard in their cages so they grow a more even spread of fat.

PETER MANIFIS: We actually laugh and joke about it. We call it the pork belly of the ocean because of the fat content and the way that the skin crisps up. And it's one of those fish I find that even the chef that doesn't know how to cook a piece of fish perfectly, I find that they'll have no problems with being able to cook this fish.

SEAN MURPHY: Marine Produce Australia has plans to grow 7,000 tonnes a year on its 600-hectare lease. It's hoping to turn a profit in two years when it reaches 2,000 tonnes.

DESIREE ALLEN: I think the Australian market really needs more Australian seafood, so we've really got to make the big push to try and fill that market if we can.

SEAN MURPHY: Cone Bay's proven so successful, the State Government wants it to be one of two new aquaculture zones in WA. It plans to proclaim 2,000 hectares here, with a production capacity for 20,000 tonnes of fin fish a year. That's more than 20 times current production.

KEN BASTON, WA FISHERIES MINISTER: We probably should be looking at 200,000 tonnes because that's how massive the area is. So this is really the pilot project for the future.

SEAN MURPHY: Fisheries Minister Ken Baston says the Kimberley Aquaculture Zone will cut the cost and time it takes to develop new farms.

KEN BASTON: My view: the sooner the better, as the minister because I want to see other investors in there and I want to see it large.

SEAN MURPHY: WA's Fisheries Department says having a zone with environmental approvals already in place will save potential operators hundreds of thousands of dollars and save up to two years that it would normally take to get a green light.

STEVE NEL, WA FISHERIES DEPARTMENT: An operator that actually wins a place in the zone, from the time he puts an application in, probably six to eight weeks or so, he'll be able to start operations without spending any money. What we'll actually do over the next probably four to five months is establish a

couple of policies by which the zone will be managed and by which areas or sites within the zone will be allocated to people who express interest.

SEAN MURPHY: One potential operator is a joint venture involving three local Aboriginal communities keen to secure a future for children with few opportunities of work in their traditional country. It's called the Aarli Mayi project, which means "seafood" in Bardi Jawi language.

JOHN HUTTON, AARLI MAYI PROJECT: They've always wanted to be involved, as sea-country people, and it's really a co-operative approach between three very proud traditional owner groups, the Dambimangari, Myala and the Bardi Jawi people.

SEAN MURPHY: John Hutton is a former director of Marine Produce Australia and his family **company** is still a major shareholder. He's providing **business** and technical advice to Aarli Mayi for a 25 per cent share in the project. He says his motivation is to see the traditional owners develop a saltwater asset in their own country that can help lead to economic independence.

JOHN HUTTON: Our family's been in the Pilbara-Kimberleys for the last 60 years with regard to exploration and pearling aquaculture activities. Our family lives in Broome now, but we've been farming pearls out of Cone Bay area for the last 30 years. So our involvement with the traditional owners of the area has been very close, close-knit.

SEAN MURPHY: The Bardi Jawi people have a deep connection with the sea and have been harvesting fish from tidal traps like this one for hundreds of years. The rock walls have been maintained for generations to help trap fish on the outgoing tide. They see moving from traditional traps to a modern aquaculture enterprise as a good fit for saltwater people.

WOSSI DAVEY, BARDI ELDER: Farming a barramundi in cages is almost similar to a lot of our cultural ways of gathering fish before, like you got the fish traps, you know? That's kind of like a trap and the fish are breeding in it.

Here we, you know, certain tides and when the wind blows, we have to go and check the traps and the fish are there, so it's almost similar to what our people have been doing, you know, over the years. Yes, to walk in, you know, in the two worlds is having that balance, so it's a good opportunity.

SEAN MURPHY: Community elder Irene Davey believes the Aarli Mayi project offers a chance for real change in a community identified as at risk under the Howard government's intervention. She believes jobs close to home will have the biggest impact on social problems.

IRENE DAVEY, BARDI ELDER: People call them lazy and they're not lazy. It's that they haven't got a job that they really can love doing. And I'**m** pretty sure a lot of the kids in our community, especially the older ones now that are in their probably late 20s and 30s, you know, they grew up around saltwater and they just want to fish and hunt. What's wrong with fishing and hunting and breeding at the same time?

SEAN MURPHY: Dambimangari rangers already patrol the waters of Cone Bay and help protect the nearby Montgomery Reef marine sanctuary. Aarli Mayi could give a serious boost to their community at Mowanjum near Derby, where out of nearly 300 residents, only 18 have full-time jobs.

WARREN BARUNGA, DAMBIMANGARI ELDER: Giving our boys, our girls, giving them proper mainstream work, you know, something that they could feel proud of, you know, build self-esteem and stuff like that.

SEAN MURPHY: The Dambimangari people have been displaced from their traditional country. Small groups still live in outposts, like this one at Yaloon on the shores of Cone Bay. Community elders hope aquaculture and the skills that come with it could lead to more people returning to country.

DONNY WOOLAGOODJA, DAMBIMANGARI ELDER: It's a good thing that if we have fish farm, well, we can sell it to, you know, overseas, make food, see, for make income. That's the best way to do it. When you start something, you have to keep it going, because if you don't, if you fall halfway, well, then everything stop. We don't want that. We want something that continue all the way line, you know, so the younger people can have opportunity.

SEAN MURPHY: Ocean-grown barramundi is in big demand in Australia, but an Aboriginal **brand** like Aarli Mayi could be a winner on global markets.

MARK LUCAS, ADVERTISING EXECUTIVE: I think the potential is incredible because the marketing story isn't about aquaculture or fish, it's about the project itself.

SEAN MURPHY: Advertising executive Mark Lucas was involved with marketing the world's biggest prawn farm in Saudi Arabia and he's done some market research on the Aboriginal seafood **brand**.

MARK LUCAS: You're in a commoditised market, so if you've got a very good story that's wrapped around traceability, that's wrapped around a clean, green, sustainable product, that's step one.

Step two is getting that message through to the consumer that the food they're purchasing is enabling communities such as these three to provide jobs for kids, to provide education opportunities and that extends out into other communities and I think the broad potential for this project is that it could reach across other agricultural markets. There's no reason that this concept needs to stop with seafood.

SEAN MURPHY: John Hutton says the key to making Aarli Mayi work will be developing an industry to support Cone Bay. He wants to use lazy assets, such as this hatchery at One Arm Point, which is licensed to breed barramundi and a range of other species, but has never been fully utilised.

JOHN HUTTON: It becomes an actual career pathway for young people.

IRENE DAVEY: I'd love to see our young people go into, like, becoming marine biologist and understanding the scientific way of looking after fish as well, because we know as a culture, we are there, our knowledge is there.

SEAN MURPHY: John Hutton believes the hatchery could become a focal point of much-needed training, working closely with the local school, universities and trade training centres.

JOHN HUTTON: So, possibly a co-curricular seafood training program from science to the mechanics of boats. So it crosses many fields. And post-farm gate, processing, so machinery works, iceworks, the hydraulics. There's many skills that aquaculture - not just growing fish - that aquaculture covers.

SEAN MURPHY: He says the Dampier Peninsula is an ideal location to develop support facilities for the expanded aquaculture zone. He wants to work with Marine Produce Australia to attract investment to support a 20,000-tonne industry.

JOHN HUTTON: What needs some serious thought being put into is that post-farmgate infrastructure that's required. So there's no point in growing all of this fish if you can't actually land it somewhere, process it somewhere.

To store the feed for 20,000 tonnes of fish requires 30,000 tonnes of feed. So, where are you going to store that? Where are you going to have that available for these fish? If you're going to have 20,000 tonnes of fish come onboard here, what are the markets as well, anyway?

But one step back is, well, where are you going to transport it to? Where are you going to transport it out of? Where are you going to get the ice for that? Where are you going to process it? Because growing that fish - it's not worthwhile actually doing it unless you've got post-farmgate infrastructure invested.

SEAN MURPHY: Marine Produce Australia currently lands its fish and stores its supplies on the ageing Derby Wharf. It's four hours away from Cone Bay by sea and only has a four-hour tidal window for getting in and out of port. The **company** has a contract with the Shire of Derby-West Kimberley, but admits a 20-fold lift in production at Cone Bay will need expanded facilities.

DESIREE ALLEN: Yes, the logistics of that we'll have to look at quite carefully. I mean, obviously, Derby is the closest place and the best for us. There is some suggestion that the Broome Port Authority, I guess, are taking over the Derby Wharf, so that may actually be an expansion in itself and I would certainly hope that Derby and Broome will work with us as we grow. So, yes, we'll be looking into that quite closely before we get to that point.

SEAN MURPHY: The **company** says it has reservations about the Aarli Mayi proposal.

DESIREE ALLEN: I think it would be great for the Aboriginal communities to have some barra operation there. I think they'd be better served to maybe join the one that's currently working and successful.

SEAN MURPHY: Desiree Allen says she'd like to see new licences granted to operators prepared to grow different types of fin fish at Cone Bay.

DESIREE ALLEN: I would be really excited if someone brought in a new species - obviously local species, but developed a new species there. A lot of people have talked about threadfin salmon as being maybe the next big thing. So, if either another operator or someone who wanted to come in and work with us to do a new species - we've always said that once we were big enough we wanted to do multiple species, diversify. So, I'd like to see that side of it grow.

SEAN MURPHY: Just who gets the licences won't be known for a few months yet, but the Fisheries Minister recently went to **China** and had meetings with one of the world's biggest aquaculture companies.

KEN BASTON: This state's been made on foreign investment. So, we look at foreign investment. But, you know, it may be the **Chinese**, it may be the Japanese, it may be from anywhere else in the world. So that's always welcome.

SEAN MURPHY: Ken Baston is noncommittal about the prospects of the Aarli Mayi joint venture.

KEN BASTON: Yes, I am aware of that, and really, when we get to the process, if they meet all the process requirements, yes, I guess they're in with a run. Everyone is, you know.

NOLAN HUNTER, KIMBERLEY LAND COUNCIL: If you can manage things in a way that they engage with those traditional owner groups, that's OK. It's when you bring in outside interests that totally do not engage with those Native Title or traditional owner groups. And so it's money coming out of the community, it's opportunities for everybody else, but not our groups, who are the most disadvantaged.

SEAN MURPHY: If aquaculture is to bring a new dawn for the saltwater people of the West Kimberley, they say self-determination needs to be more than a slogan.

WOSSI DAVEY: They should really give the local people the opportunity first and look before they can go anywhere overseas or anyone in Australia.

WARREN BARUNGA: It's pretty hard for us to be a part of something that isn't run by us or we don't have any control by.

IRENE DAVEY: Jobs and people working in home, living and working in the home, and working with something that they're familiar with, you know, because we are saltwater people.

DONNY WOOLAGOODJA: Aboriginal people didn't have that in the past. They used to work for people all the time, but now it's time for them to step up and do something for themselves.

NS genv : Natural Environment | ntra : Transcripts | gcat : Political/General News | ncat : Content Types | nfact : Factiva Filters | nfce : C&E Exclusion Filter | nfcpex : C&E Executive News Filter | niwe : IWE Filter

RE austr : Australia | waustr : Western Australia | nterry : Northern Territory | apacz : Asia Pacific | ausnz : Australia/Oceania

IPD barramundi

PUB Australian Broadcasting Corporation

AN Document ABCTRS0020141012eaab00002

