

Exciting times for Maori seafood opportunities

Anna Yallop

Matariki has been a great time to reflect and plan for the future. One of the most satisfying findings of 2020 from a research and development (R&D) perspective is the exponential increase in seafood opportunities being investigated by Maori, who are demonstrating their ability to use their knowledge and assets in ways that will generate significant value for New Zealand.

Moana New Zealand, Wakatu and Sealord have, for many years been undertaking and commissioning world-class R&D and product development and continue to do so but I have seen an explosion in the last 12 months of projects initiated by Maori Trusts, tribes and small to large scale Maori companies. This is exciting for the



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science system, for iwi, for companies and for New Zealand, as Maori have proven they have no shortage of ideas and ventures. Seafood Innovations Ltd (SIL) has a long history of working with Maori companies to co-fund R&D projects, including ones to optimise chilled seafood, develop protocols for hatchery spat, advance oyster growing technologies and improve paua processing and transportation. Emerging areas of development are impressive and have the potential to be game-changers for Maori.

Moana New Zealand and Cawthron are working together on a SIL project to enhance oyster production using high-tech animal husbandry. Wakatu, with support from Cawthron have invested to domesticate a new shellfish species, following on from their previous investment in their flat oyster – Kiwa. Bye Bycatch is working with Sealord and others on using video footage from fishing nets to observe fish behavior and develop techniques for releasing non-target species and Kahukuraariki Trust is working alongside NIWA to look into re-establishing the Native Rock Oyster in Taitokerau. Other projects in the pipeline include looking at ways that iwi can extract higher value from low-value species, using artificial intelligence to ascertain seafood quality prior to shipment, tagging technology and the bioactivity of certain seafoods compared with others.

Whilst not necessarily initiated by Maori companies, many of SIL's other projects involve iwi either via consultation and engagement, through collaboration or because the projects have the potential to impact on Maori and this involvement up front and throughout projects is increasingly becoming the norm and has positive spin-offs for all parties. This engagement creates the chance for even more value to be added to projects by incorporating practices that may not have been considered, by ensuring buy-in and support and by opening up the possibility of new avenues of exploration that can benefit multiple groups, regions and of course, the R&D pipeline.

What's particularly interesting is the collaboration between different iwi groups who are looking to get scale from their projects so as to maximise the long-term benefits for their people through high-paying jobs, increased skills and by leveraging traditional and new knowledge in different and exciting ways. Attending

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last year's Maori Fisheries Conference for the first time was an enlightening experience for me and I came away feeling inspired by the high levels of enthusiasm, innovation, and pride in the potential for Maori by the conference attendees.

Maori seafood companies are in a pivotal place internationally, as I've certainly seen the interest that overseas companies have in Maori business opportunities and this interest is being masterfully cultivated by iwi groups working closely with these multinational organisations.

I look forward to seeing what novel products are developed that are unique and highly valuable because of their Maori provenance. If the last year is anything to go by, these next few years will be crucial and I for one can't wait to see where New Zealand is headed.

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