

## MEDIA RELEASE

Monday 24 March 2008

### **TIGHTER CONTROLS DEMANDED ON PRAWN IMPORTS AFTER FOREIGN DISEASE REPORTED IN NORTH QUEENSLAND FARMS**

**FISHERMEN'S representatives have called for tighter controls on imported prawns following reports a foreign disease fatal to crustaceans has been found in North Queensland.**

Mr Robin Hansen, a spokesman for the Queensland fishing industry, said reports a foreign prawn disease called IHNV had been found in prawn samples from North Queensland aquaculture ponds would send shock waves through the seafood industry.

"It has been reported that the Australian Seafood Importers Association has had samples of prawns from two NQ prawn farms tested by laboratories and found the IHNV virus," Mr Hansen said.

"This virus is not native to Australia and could only have been transmitted by imported prawns. This is exactly what the fishing and aquaculture industries here have been worried about and means imports will have to be scrutinised even more stringently than they are now.

"The IHNV virus is bad enough but if some of the other foreign prawn diseases carried by imported prawns were to establish themselves here, the wild-caught and aquaculture industries could be wiped out at a long-term cost of billions of dollars."

At the same time, Mr Hansen ridiculed suggestions that the fact one virus had been discovered in Australian prawns called into question the need for Australia's strict control on prawn imports.

"The foreign diseases we are desperately trying to keep out of Australia are not fatal to humans but absolutely devastate stocks of prawns and other crustaceans, like mud crabs and lobsters. They have already cost billions of dollars in losses overseas and we don't want them in Australia, that's for sure. The fact that one of these diseases may have turned up in North Queensland does not mean we should be any less vigilant in future.

"In human terms, it's like saying if we discovered smallpox in Australia, then we should allow in bubonic plague, avian influenza and Ebola hemorrhagic fever as well.

"In fact, just the opposite is the case. Discovering one foreign prawn disease in Australia demonstrates that it can happen and how careful we have to be to ensure no more foreign diseases enter the country the same way.

"The only way diseases can do that is to be carried here on imported prawns. Therefore, we need even tighter controls on imported prawns, not relaxed controls.

"These diseases could wipe out huge percentages of Australia's farmed and wild prawns, become established in the natural environment, and cause countless millions of dollars in losses to Australian producers by killing large numbers of prawns year after year after year.

"These reported cases with IHNV should set off alarm bells in Canberra and animal health agencies right round Australia. This is very, very serious"

### **Current bans justified**

Mr Hansen said that, currently, most imports of raw (uncooked) prawns were banned because of disease risk and this reported discovery of a foreign disease in Australian farmed prawns demonstrated the bans were completely justified.

"There are four main foreign prawn diseases common in many parts of the world -- transmitted via prawns shipped from one country to another -- that we are worried about," Mr Hansen said. "These are called White Spot Syndrome Virus (WSSV), Taura Syndrome Virus (TSV), Yellow Head Virus (YHV) and Infectious Hypodermal & Hematopoietic Necrosis Virus (IHNV).

"In roughly the 10 years up till 2001, scientists estimated these diseases together had caused losses in prawn aquaculture round the world totaling more than US\$10 billion. The worst ones were WSSV, which caused losses of up to \$6 billion, and TSV, up to \$2 billion.

"Prawn importers argue that these diseases can be transferred only on live prawns and, therefore, imports of frozen uncooked prawns will not cause a problem, but that's just not true. American scientists say that the WSSV virus is now established in wild prawn stocks in several US States and that it was introduced by imported frozen prawns reprocessed in US coastal packing plants.\*  
(\* See NOAA research report referenced below; page 8.)

"WSSV was also detected in mud crabs in the Northern Territory that had been fed on imported prawns but the disease was very quickly recognised and eliminated because the crabs were in a fisheries research centre.

"However, we've seen what can happen and it completely justifies the controls imposed so far. Now, after the NQ revelations, it looks like even tougher controls are needed before imported prawns wipe out our local prawn fishing and farming industries."

### **"Extraordinary claims"**

Mr Hansen also said a seafood importers representative had made "extraordinary claims" about Federal and Queensland politicians that should be retracted immediately.

"An importers' spokesman was reported as accusing politicians who implemented the ban on imported uncooked prawns of 'political bastardry' and said it was 'nothing other than Queensland politicians trying to protect their own electorate'.

"These statements should be retracted immediately. The Federal Government, along with a number of State Governments, are simply responding to a threat their scientists have told them is real and immediate. These diseases could cost the Australian economy billions of dollars long term and cause irreparable harm to the natural marine environment, especially crustaceans and dependent species.

"The ban on raw prawn imports is absolutely justified and, from what the Seafood Importers Association themselves have now told the media, may not be stringent enough."

**Further information:** Mr **Robin Hansen**, QSIA Senior Vice-President (& Trawl Committee Chair)  
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**Note:** The alleged discovery of the IHNV virus was reported on the ABC's "PM" program last Thursday (20/3/2008) and a transcript (headed "Prawn ban faces criticism") is available on the ABC website at: <http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2008/s2196059.htm>

For an overview of the impact of IHNV and other major diseases of prawns, go to the US National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration research report at:  
[http://www.lib.noaa.gov/japan/aquaculture/proceedings/report32/lightner\\_corrected.pdf](http://www.lib.noaa.gov/japan/aquaculture/proceedings/report32/lightner_corrected.pdf)