

oceanic food *in the media*

industry issues

The new prawn on the block



By Cyril Lee - Oceanic Foods

There has been a buzz of excitement in the industry as a new species of prawn has hit the market. With a sweet taste, firm texture and three growing seasons per year in tropical areas ensuring reliable supply, many view the new *Penaeus vannamei* prawn as one which has great market potential benefiting the import industry - and ultimately the final consumer. Amazingly however, the prawn has no official Australian market name.

Tropical prawn?

Unofficial channels have suggested the name 'Tropical White prawn' or merely 'Tropical prawn' be used. As the prawn originates from Ecuador and the surrounding Central and South American regions, this name is not unjustified. However, the hardness of this prawn now sees it cultured in subtropical areas such as China. Should these prawns be marketed separately as 'Subtropical White Prawns' or would the consumer be misled when getting 'Tropical Prawns' which are in fact farmed in strictly speaking, non-tropical areas?

Furthermore, why create confusion with other white prawns from tropical areas? For example, *Penaeus stylirostris* (Mexican white prawn) is 'caught' in the tropical regions of Mexico, El Salvador and Guatemala; *Penaeus indicus* (Indian White prawn) is caught in the tropical regions from East and Southeast Africa through to Malaysia and Indonesia to South China and Northern Australia; *Penaeus occidentalis* (Western White prawn) is a white prawn caught in the tropical region of central America and Ecuador; and *Penaeus orientalis* or *chinensis* (White prawn) is an important catch in the tropical parts of the China Sea. As these prawns are caught in tropical areas and are called 'white', they could easily be called 'Tropical Prawns' too.

Where to now?

The new species has been locally available for at least the last 6-8 months. Packaging has been printed, marketing campaigns commenced and advertising material released giving consumers long unpalatable latin jargon or worse - incorrect names used for

other species. Unfortunately, this means the market cannot wait for this product to be named in the not too distant future. An official decision needs to be made now.

In the meantime, however, rather than create unnecessary market confusion by referring to a new arbitrary name or the name used for another species, as one of the first to import the product into Australia, we suggest vendors choose to market these prawns as *Vannamei White* as originally coined by our industry colleagues overseas. We further believe this name should be adopted to avoid confusion in the future as the demand for better identity information for what consumers are eating is required.

Although this name retains some undesirable latin nomenclature, it is not too unpalatable and does serve to unambiguously distinguish the prawn from other species in the eyes of the average consumer. This is much better than using a name used for another species. Who knows, the powers that be may even choose this name: *Vannamei White*.

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