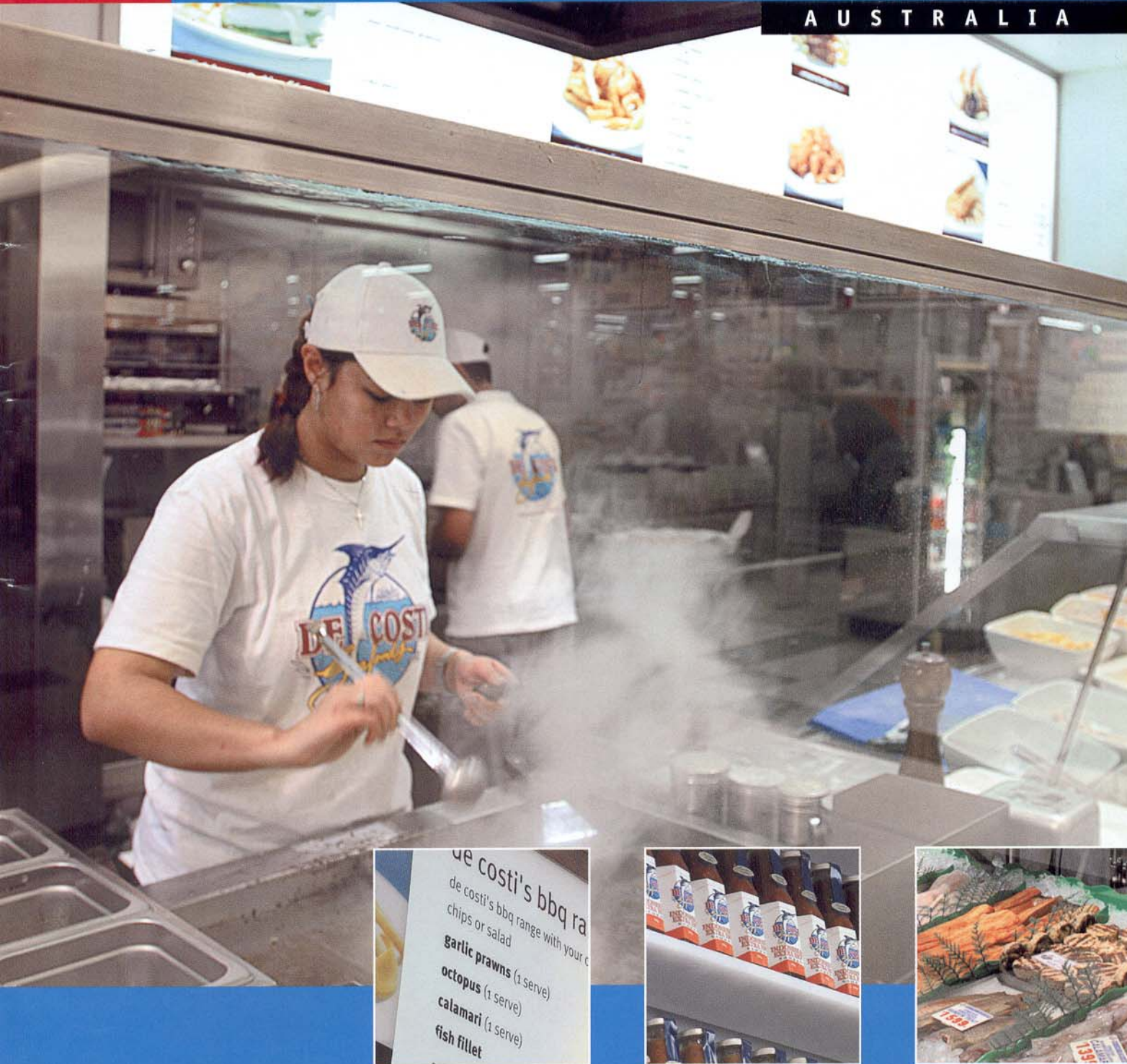


# seafood

A U S T R A L I A

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De Costi's bbq range with your choice of chips or salad  
garlic prawns (1 serve)  
octopus (1 serve)  
calamari (1 serve)  
fish fillet



## De Costi Seafoods franchising new retail formats

# New imported prawn species making a big splash

***A new species of imported farmed prawn has hit the Australian market and is destined to make quite a splash over the coming months.***



*A colour comparison of our most popular prawn species. From the top: a black tiger prawn, an eastern king prawn, a farmed banana prawn and a vannamei prawn. The size comparison is typical of the most common grades for each*

**R**etailers and other trade end-users are so impressed with the look and taste of the new species that many are speculating that it will soon become a major competitor for the black tiger.

With a significant price advantage because of its better growing performance, *Penaeus vannamei* (known internationally as the western white shrimp - but simply called 'vannamei' here for the time being), seems destined to re-shape the current market - especially in the smaller size ranges.

The vannamei is no stranger in international markets, especially in the US where it has been imported from Central and South America for over a decade, and is even favoured by US prawn farmers because of its fast growth. It is now the leading farm-raised species throughout Latin America. Broodstock can be held in captivity for up to 30 years - a significant advantage over monodon (black tiger) where breeding is still reliant on replenishment with wild stock.

Vannamei is now widely grown in China and south east Asian countries including Taiwan,

Thailand and Indonesia.

The vannamei looks similar to our local banana prawn (*Penaeus merguensis*) prompting some initial attempts to have it named that here but it is more closely related to *Penaeus stylirostris*, the variety farmed in New Caledonia and sold here as Paradise Prawn, and the Chinese white shrimp (*Penaeus chinensis*).

The paler colour of the prawn (compared to the black tiger) is by no means detrimental to its appearance, and its softer texture and sweeter flavour is certain to make it popular with consumers.

However, the supply is currently limited to smaller grades: mainly 30-40 (per pound) and some in the 20-30 range, although the latter is often mostly the slightly smaller 26-30 size. The vannamei grows slowly after it reaches 18 grams, so it is more economical to harvest it by the time it reaches the 26-30 size range.

## **Being imported, all stocks are frozen, still leaving the Australian prawn industry plenty of room to move with its daily supply of fresh, and mostly larger, prawns.**

One of the first companies to import the vannamei is Oceanic Foods, based in Melbourne. Oceanic has been involved in the prawn trade since its creation in 1978 when founder, Cyril Lee, moved from Port Lincoln where he had been the first general manager of Australian Bight Fisheries. Cyril marketed the first processed-on-board southern king prawns out of South Australia, from the vessel "Tacoma". Today, his son Victor Lee is Oceanic's general manager.

"Our Vannamei prawns are sourced from a world-leading integrated prawn farming and processing facility in Indonesia which guarantees consistent supply throughout the year. This facility employs 30,000 people and can handle 100 to 200 tonnes per day. All the product complies with the strictest international standards. Furthermore, this facility harvests the prawns in three major seasons in one year, as compared to the black

tiger where there are one to two main seasons."

"We have received a very positive reaction to the prawns since trialing various shipments here since November last year," Vincent said. "Because of the generally smaller sizing, we have to get past the usual perception that 'big prawns are better', and promote that smaller prawns are a tastier eating prawn."

"Also, if you consider the prices in relation to larger prawns - why pay a high price for a big prawn?" Especially when this prawn has the added benefit of a natural sweet flavour."

"In addition to the general trade, buffet style eateries are particularly keen about this product but there are good opportunities for retail frozen packs. Household consumers will be able to thaw the product anytime and get the best quality for their money. Whether the industry will take up this opportunity or not is yet to be seen."

Vincent added that the industry is still yet to finalise a marketing name for the prawn. "Until such time, it is still referred to as 'vannamei' or 'vannamei white'."

The vannamei made its first major appearance in retail outlets just before Easter but was hardly noticed - probably due to confusion over marketing names. Indeed, this is emerging as a major issue for both importers and distributors.

One of the biggest concerns of local prawns farmers so far is not the competition, but potential for fraudulent marketing at retail level. Sam Gordon, marketing manager for Seafarm Pty Ltd, which grows and markets the highly successful Crystal Bay brand banana prawn, said the similarity in appearance and lack of familiar marketing name had already led to several cases of mis-naming, and at least two of outright substitution. He said action had been instigated on those two occasions over brand name violation. He warned that local producers would be closely monitoring shops to ensure correct labelling.

Price will also be an issue for local producers, with the smaller size vannamei wholesaling for up to seven dollars per kilo below equivalent farmed and wild catch prawns. Unless there are changes to the current global conditions, the impact will be felt strongly over the coming winter months with demand down, local supply high, and the Australian dollar trading at its highest for three years - enhancing the price advantage of imports.