QUESTION ON NOTICE
No. 288
Asked on Tuesday, 11 March 2008

MR LAWLOR asked the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries (MR MULHERIN)-

QUESTION:

How will Queensland diners benefit from advances in the emerging crab aquaculture sector?

ANSWER:

As crab farming grows in Queensland, crab connoisseurs can expect a wider variety of options than is currently available.

The farmed crab harvest is not limited by the same regulations as wild crab fisheries, as they do not impact on fishing resources. Therefore, female mud crabs from farms will be able to be legally marketed, as will crabs smaller than those currently available from the wild crab fishery.

This is not about competition between fishers and farmers – it's about growing the market for Queensland crabs. Single serve mud crabs could be offered for sale by farms, as compared to the very large prestigious crabs currently harvested from the wild, which are more suitable for two or more diners – which means mud crabs on more Queensland plates.

Advances in crab aquaculture allow far greater control over harvested product quality, thereby ensuring premium meat fullness every time and consistent flavour attributes to meet consumer expectations.

An advantage of farmed crabs is that they can be grown to meet specific market needs in terms of size, sex, hard shell or soft shell and market volume in peak demand periods such as Easter or Chinese New Year. In addition, farms will be able to produce year round, addressing some of the problems in the market at present, where the supply of wild crabs is characterised by significant seasonal variation.

A product relatively new to the market is fresh, soft shell blue swimmer crab. This gourmet product is of the highest quality as it is never frozen, unlike imported soft shell crabs from Asia. This product is already being well received by high-end seafood restaurants and is a factor behind recent further investment in this sector.

Queensland and Australian diners alike are just beginning to appreciate the efforts of the innovative Research and Development that the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries has undertaken over the last decade or so to develop this new farming sector, in collaboration with the Northern Territory Government, that builds on the fantastic reputation that the Queensland muddies and the blue swimmers already has amongst seafood aficionados.