



# DOMESTIC SUPPLY CHAIN INTERVIEWS CHEFS AND SEAFOOD RETAILERS



**Farm Co-operatives  
& Collaboration**  
*Pilot Program*



**Honey & Fox**  
sweet and smart

## BACKGROUND

Ten supply chain interviews took place in Adelaide, Sydney, Sunshine Coast, Melbourne and regional South Australia to identify seafood use in their establishments.

Interviews were undertaken with head chefs from casual dining through to fine dining venues. Seafood retailers were also interviewed.

Seven restaurants were interviewed, and three retailers were interviewed in total.

Data gathered from the supply chain interviews informed the consumer insight part of the larger Australian Wild Abalone domestic project and were part of developing the guidelines and recommendations. Chefs were critical to understand how abalone is used in a restaurant setting and retailers were critical to understanding if they had noticed changes to consumer behaviour in the past 12 months.

## INTERVIEWS - FOOD SERVICE SECTOR (CHEFS)

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### Sydney, NSW: Casual Dining

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1. Approximately what % of your menu is seafood?

- 0-25%

2. Do you currently have abalone on the menu?

- No

If no, why? (e.g. Is it because you have never used it before or have very little information on the product? Is it that you have no demand? Is it too expensive? Is it difficult to source?)

- *We tend to focus on steak and other varieties of meat. We do have some seafood but we limit it to salmon, calamari and octopus.*

3. What could suppliers do to get you to start using abalone or more abalone?

- *Nothing. It's not suitable for our target market*

4. What could producers do to get you to start using abalone or more abalone?

- *Nothing. It's not suitable for our target market*

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### Adelaide, SA: High-End Dining

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1. Approximately what % of your menu is seafood?

- 25-50%

2. Do you currently have abalone on the menu?

- *No*

3. If no, why? (e.g. Is it because you have never used it before or have very little information on the product? Is it that you have no demand? Is it too expensive? Is it difficult to source?)

- *Source and pricing. I don't want to store this product frozen. There is no steady demand from customers*

4. What could suppliers do to get you to start using abalone or more abalone?

- *Abalone is just not on our radar.*

5. What could producers do to get you to start using abalone or more abalone?

- *Maybe help with a chef's special. This would allow us to test the waters with a small quantity.*

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***Regional SA: Casual Dining***

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1. Approximately what % of your menu is seafood?

- *50-75%*

2. Do you currently have abalone on the menu?

- *No*

3. Where did you learn about cooking with abalone?

- *I don't know how to cook it. Nothing is offered at TAFE Regency Park*

4. Do you know what types of customers order/demand abalone on your menu?

- *Customers have never asked for abalone. People don't know much about it and it appears so infrequently on Australian menus that they just don't seem to expect it at all.*

5. If no, why? (e.g. Is it because you have never used it before or have very little information on the product? Is it that you have no demand? Is it too expensive? Is it difficult to source?)

- *Abalone is just not in our heads. The perception is that it is a rarity.*

6. What could suppliers do to get you to start using abalone or more abalone?

- *Promote various ways of cooking it. Take the mystery away from it. A lot of people don't cook fish at home and there aren't many recipes to call on. Chefs and diners need to be better educated.*

7. What could producers do to get you to start using abalone or more abalone?

- *There's a notion that abalone is very scarce and there's a question mark over sustainability. A bit of a stigma attached to abalone as just about all people hear about it is in the news when someone gets caught taking it illegally. Never see abalone featured on cooking shows like*

*MasterChef – just think how many more people are interested in such dishes as baby octopus now. Same could happen for abalone if promoted more in an educative way.*

*Same with Goolwa pipis – not that long ago people saw them as little more than bait. This has now turned around completely with customers seeing them as a very high quality, sought after tasty dish. This happened (from memory) after the producers and State Government got together and formed a new management plan for harvesting, and a new marketing plan which promoted sustainability and cooking options. Maybe abalone producers could get together with the State Government and do something similar?*

*As an extra thought – I've never seen an abalone live, don't know where they live, certainly don't know how to cook it or what it tastes like. From a commercial point of view I don't know how it is provided, or what is the shelf life?*

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#### **Adelaide, SA: High-End, Casual Dining**

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1. Approximately what % of your menu is seafood?
  - *25-50%*
2. Do you currently have abalone on the menu?
  - *No*
3. If no, why? (e.g. Is it because you have never used it before or have very little information on the product? Is it that you have no demand? Is it too expensive? Is it difficult to source?)
  - *There's no demand in a high end, hotel bistro setting*
4. What could suppliers do to get you to start using abalone or more abalone?
  - *Provide samples. More promotion. Education on cooking and serving suggestions*
5. What could producers do to get you to start using abalone or more abalone?
  - *For me it's all in the marketing as the demand is not there from my customers*

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#### **Sunshine Coast, QLD: Fine Dining**

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1. Approximately what % of your menu is seafood?
  - *50-75%*
2. Do you currently have abalone on the menu?
  - *No*

3. If no, why? (e.g. Is it because you have never used it before or have very little information on the product? Is it that you have no demand? Is it too expensive? Is it difficult to source?

- *To be honest we don't really see it up here. Our suppliers don't seem to get it. I have asked a couple of times for special events but that don't deal with it. The only time I have used it was when I was at Jolley's Boathouse in Adelaide. From memory it was quite expensive.*

4. What could suppliers do to get you to start using abalone or more abalone?

- *If they were to start sourcing it to sell up here I would be more the happy to start using it on our menu. It's a big point of difference for us, and our clientele love that.*

5. What could producers do to get you to start using abalone or more abalone?

- *Come and see us chefs in person. I see maybe 2-3 seafood producers a year. And to be honest I think it's a pretty poor number. Especially with the amount of seafood on our menu.*

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#### Adelaide, SA: High End, Casual Dining

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1. Approximately what % of your menu is seafood?

- *50-75%*

2. Do you currently have Abalone on the menu?

- *No*

3. Where did you learn about cooking with abalone?

- *Went to TAFE Regency Park for four years, never learnt a thing about abalone there. I've been a chef for 12 years after that and I've never been taught anything about abalone – self-taught learning via internet, cookbooks etc. I watch a lot of cooking shows e.g. Food Network and I've never seen abalone featured.*

4. Do you know what types of customers order/demand abalone on your menu?

- *Daring customers! Those with deep wallets. But it shouldn't be forgotten that people with less disposable income are still keen to lash out on something special if that's how they perceive it to be....these are the people completely untapped in the abalone market.*

5. If no, why? (e.g. Is it because you have never used it before or have very little information on the product? Is it that you have no demand? Is it too expensive? Is it difficult to source?

- *We've had it on the menu in the past but price was an issue and customer demand slow. We got to a point where we were offering it to our customers on order and we'd source for them as they asked for it, but it was such a small demand we stopped this.*

6. What could suppliers do to get you to start using abalone or more abalone?

- *Price is a real barrier. But also there's not much promotion locally to push abalone. We currently have about 70% seafood on our Teppanyaki menu (e.g. salmon, tuna, scallop and lobster), and there's room on our menu for it and our customers want local food but consumers need to be educated. We are currently preparing a degustation meal that is also a testing ground for our future menus. This type of situation might be an opportunity for suppliers to work with chefs to include abalone on more menus and get customers feedback. For example, we offer Teppanyaki Wagyu beef – there's no question from our customers re: the price because there's been so much promotion about the quality and taste of this beef. But people are clueless about abalone.*

7. What could producers do to get you to start using abalone or more abalone?

- *I watch a lot of cooking shows and abalone is never featured. Same in supermarket promos. Need to bring abalone to people's attention and to their wallets! People will pay if they see the value in it. So greater exposure and education.*

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#### Adelaide, SA: High-End, Casual Dining

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1. Approximately what % of your menu is seafood?

- *0-25%*

2. Do you currently have Abalone on the menu?

- *No*

3. If no, why? (e.g. Is it because you have never used it before or have very little information on the product? Is it that you have no demand? Is it too expensive? Is it difficult to source?)

- *Few reasons, no demand is the biggest one for me especially in the high-end, café setting that we have. Price is another big one for me, don't think sourcing is the problem, I can always get it, but it may be frozen.*

*Abalone is a hard one, we worked with a lot with Cheong Liaw when I was at The Grange, but haven't really used it much since. I do know some interesting ways to cook it though.*

4. What could suppliers do to get you to start using abalone or more abalone?

- *Maybe pushing it a bit more, maybe some samples to work with, information on cooking and serving suggestions*

5. What could producers do to get you to start using abalone or more abalone?

- *For me its marketing, it's the demand that's not there from the customer. Do something like what Australian pork has done to change the perception of pork.*

# INTERVIEWS - FOOD SERVICE SECTOR (RETAILERS)

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Melbourne, Victoria

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1. Are customers buying habits changing?

- *No*

2. Are customers spending more money?

- *No*

3. Are customers spending less money?

- *No – Our customer spending habits have remained the same over the past five years. Our average spend varies but I believe this is due to the fact that some customers are shopping for a larger family.*

4. Specifically, do you sell abalone?

- *No – Only on request*

5. If no, why?

- *It is a product that in the past has taken a long time to sell. We would buy frozen (individually vac packed) portions that would be displayed in a freezer.*

*I once bought live baby abalone as a trial – I was not able to sell it within our customer base. Also a bit too small so very low yield.*

6. Is there much demand for abalone from your customers?

- *Our Asian customers request occasionally.*

7. If yes, do you know why they are purchasing it, i.e. special occasion.

- *I don't know*

8. If no, why not? (e.g. is it because your customers lack knowledge and information about abalone or are there other reasons?)

- *It is a fairly expensive product. I have used it often as we grew up catching and cooking our own but there is not a huge call for it with our customers. I find those that do want it would normally be divers who have access to get their own.*

9. What could producers do to get you to start selling abalone or selling more abalone?

- *I have very little information on abalone and have not seen any hand out fliers or books that we could use as retail display or info. I would even say that unless I look fairly hard, a supplier is even hard to come across. I have collected a few names over the years when I have come across a supplier but it's not "in your face" when needed.*

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### Port Stephens, NSW

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1. Are customers buying habits changing?
  - *No*
2. Are customers spending more money?
  - *No*
3. Are customers spending less money?
  - *They are spending the same or perhaps a little less*
4. If yes how much less?
  - *On average 5-10% less*
5. Specifically, do you sell abalone?
  - *No*
6. If no, why?
  - *It's too expensive for our market and our customers*
7. Is there much demand for abalone from your customers?
  - *There is no demand for us as there are no Chinese around.*
8. If no, why not? (e.g. is it because your customers lack knowledge and information about Abalone or are there other reasons?)
  - *Our customers don't understand abalone but as we all know, the Chinese certainly do. It's been part of their food for centuries.*
9. What could producers do to get you to start selling abalone or selling more abalone?
  - *There really is not anything they can do to make us to start to stock it. We don't have Chinese tourists come into our shop and it's too expensive. It just wouldn't work for us*

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### Sunshine Coast, Queensland

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1. Are customers buying habits changing?
  - *Yes*
2. If yes how? What are seafood customers now purchasing?
  - *Hard to say, just not coming in. We had a good holiday period over Christmas but in general we are seeing a change in spending habits.*



3. Are customers spending more money?

- *Yes*

4. If yes how much more ?

- *Average spend has increased by around 15%, not taking into account price increases.*

5. Specifically, do you sell abalone?

- *No*

6. If no, why?

- *We have tried but being in retail in Queensland our market are not abalone buyers. Very few Asian tourists visit this area.*

7. Is there much demand for Abalone from your customers?

- *No*

8. If no, why not? (e.g. is it because your customers lack knowledge and information about Abalone or are there other reasons?)

- *I would say lack of knowledge would be a factor, particularly for something so expensive. Knowing exactly what to do, or better still have it value added, heat and eat would improve sales.*

9. What could producers do to get you to start selling abalone or selling more abalone?

- *As per the above, I think value added, attractively packaged abalone in smaller set weight packs would be work. Set weight and smaller packs bring pick up prices down. Value added will remove customer stigma on abalone's "difficult preparation"*