

Salmon fishing to get a boost

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JORDAN GERRANS *Albany Advertiser* February 28, 2014, 3:27 pm



Picture: Malcolm Heberle Garry Bevan is hoping the commercial salmon fishing industry can be rejuvenated through better handling of catches.

The south coast commercial salmon industry has been slowly declining over the past decade, but a new plan could return the once lucrative industry to its peak.

WA's salmon catch was as high as 2500 tonnes as late as 2004, but had fallen to just under 250 tonnes by 2012.

Decreased market demand and cheaper imports, further aggravated by the high Australian dollar, have aided in the downfall.

In 2013, salmon was at its equal lowest price in Australia at just over 50 cents per kilo.

However, a new project run through Curtin University's Centre of Excellence for Science, Seafood and Health, together with WA Fishing Industry Council, Fisheries Research and Development Cooperation and Australian Seafood Cooperative Research Centre, could turn that around.

Researchers and local fishermen are exploring placing salmon straight into ice slurries that would improve the quality of the fish.

Bevan's Seafood managing director Garry Bevan said the plan had been in motion for about six months.

"We are going to ice slurry all the fish at the beaches and get a machine from Queensland to spike the fish for us so that will improve the quality considerably," he said.

"We just need to improve the quality. The traditional method of handling the fish is history.

"We have been doing sampling this year, it is still in an interim part but we are trying to get the salmon fishery back up and running."

Mr Bevan said no one was keen to buy salmon in the form it was presently handled as it affected the quality of the product.

Curtin senior research fellow Dr Janet Howieson said salmon was underutilised.

"It's a tricky product because of the short season and they get very big catches so it's very hard to look after the fish," she said.

"We have done a lot of work on the best process handling. It will go into ice slurries as soon as caught, kept chilled and no temperature alteration."

Mr Bevan said a revitalisation in the salmon industry would be a financial windfall for the local fishing industry.

"It would generate a considerable amount of money for Albany," he said.

Dr Howieson said eight to 10 new markets had been sought out for the better-handled salmon.

“It would be a change but it would be a different market than traditional use for Australian salmon as a food, rather than bait or canning,” she said.

“It must have some health benefits, we just need to find the customer and handle the product correctly and I think we will succeed.”