

# Small firm thrives on delivering quality

Richard Loader

There is nothing more mouth wateringly salubrious than a fish dinner delivered fresh from New Zealand's pristine ocean waters to the eagerly awaiting plate.

Over a thirty year period New Plymouth's family owned and operated Egmont Seafoods Ltd has established a respected reputation for providing a wide variety high quality fish caught in Taranaki waters by local fishermen.

Purchased by Keith and Karena Mawson in 1986, the business has developed into a highly successful retail, wholesale and export operation with all fish processed on site by Egmont Seafood staff.

Just a line east away from New Plymouth's Port, the business operates in close proximity to the fishing vessels that supply it with the catch of the day.

The Mawson's son, Caleb, joined the business two years ago to oversee retail operations and currently carries the moniker of Sales Manager.

Caleb is passionate about the family operation that his parents have built up and the relationship the business enjoys with the fishermen, so integral to its business, and the many customers who buy the product.

"We're only a small operation of around 25 people so the business does have that real family feel to it and that has a positive impact on all our suppliers and customers."

"They have confidence they're working with a company that's moving forward with people behind the scenes with a strong knowledge of the industry that is being passed down to the next generation."

Egmont Seafoods wholesale operation supplies restaurants, fish & chip outlets, caterers & supermarkets throughout the North Island.

Caleb says the local wholesale market has enjoyed significant growth over the last financial year as more consumers become savvy about where their food has come from.

"People want to support local business so the restaurant channel has really grown."

"Our main fish species are snapper, gurnard, tarakihi and the restaurants sell it saying fresh fish of the day caught by Egmont Seafoods. We have a great reputation locally and nationally for providing a high quality product."

Quality starts from when the catch is landed on the vessels, which Caleb says is crucial to how the product is delivered to the plate.

"It's important that the catch is going into ice as soon as possible.

"Our fishermen do a great job looking after the fish at sea and that comes down to the good relationship we have with those fishermen who want to provide us with a high quality product so that we can pass that same quality on to our customers."

The catch is then unloaded and delivered to Egmont Seafoods plant, where the processing team understands their role in the quality chain and the product is quickly turned over, ensuring freshness.

Egmont Seafoods retail operation is attached to the processing plant and has recently undergone a refurbishment with the concept designed by Karena.



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Opened up to provide a lighter breezier feel and the installation of new cabinets, customers can carefully peruse and select the fish of choice, have it weighed, priced and wrapped while also being able to watch the processing operation in the plant.

"People love it and are amazed at how fast the team can fillet the fish.

"We always make sure we have snapper, gurnard, tarakihi in stock and then have a wider range that people might not be able to purchase from a supermarket. So we generally have a good mix of 10 -12 different species.

"We sell some other seafood products that we buy in and have some local product, like greens and salads from Roebuck Farms. We're trying to create a local feel in the shop where locally produced product can be sourced."

With no other fishing ports from Wellington up to Raglan, there is a massive stretch of coastline with very little fishing activity - but a very healthy and sustainable fishing resource.

Caleb says the industry is very important to the Taranaki community.

"The industry provides jobs, and customers can buy locally sourced fish straight from our factory. Restaurant and takeaways don't have to be buying product out of town.

"I think that it's important that there are small companies like ours involved in this industry—there are not many of us left now."



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Reflecting upon the future of the industry Caleb points out that there is a lack of young fishermen and skippers coming through with a number of skippers looking at retirement in the next 5 -10 years.

"We need to ensure there are younger fishermen coming through to take the helm.

"We work closely with the fishermen in regard to relief skippers and put ads on Seek.

"We contact the fishing schools in the South Island to see if we can attract young fishermen in to the province.

"It's something we need to be proactive on as supply is the biggest threat to our business."

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