

# SEAFOOD

NEW ZEALAND

**Vanguard sets  
new standard for  
mussel industry**

**Swimming  
with sharks at  
the Chathams**



# Vanguard sets new standard for mussel industry

A multi-million-dollar mussel harvester built by Q-West in Whanganui for Nelson-based MacLab quickly proved itself ideal for the job. Bill Moore talked to the builders and their happy clients.





On its third day in operation, *Vanguard* returns to Port Nelson with an 80-tonne haul of mussels harvested in Golden Bay. Photo, Richard McBride.

Q-West has built many boats of many types, but *Vanguard* is the first mussel harvester to be launched from its yard at Castlecliff, Whanganui.

Constructed over 12 months and completed on time and on budget, the 30-metre aluminium vessel incorporates several features new to the mussel industry.

Most notably it has ballast tanks to improve its stability when working on the mussel farms and travelling across Tasman and Golden bays – areas that are more challenging than the sheltered waters of the Marlborough Sounds.

This is just one of the reasons that MaLab is so satisfied with the new vessel, which was officially welcomed to Nelson just before Christmas.

"I've been part of a few big projects and I'd have to say this was one of the most pleasurable to be part of," said MaLab marine farming manager Scott Gillanders.

"It didn't take long working with Q-West to develop confidence and trust with them. It was a no-surprises journey – they did exactly what they said they would do and we're very happy with the outcome."

This is the sort of compliment that Q-West works to win with every build.

Chief executive Colin Mitchell said the company – which can be working on up to five vessels at any one time – strives to develop good working

relationships with every client.

Customers require detailed records and a high level of confidence that they will get what they order, on time, he said.

"That's what we bring to the table – we're going to put realistic delivery dates and we have the resources that if we find the projects are falling behind for whatever reason, to bolster the numbers to bring it back into line.

**"If they wanted something extra during the build, it was crystal clear if it was in or out, with none of that animosity that you might otherwise get – that made life very easy."**

**– COLIN MITCHELL**

"We run in-depth production charts and provide lots of feedback to the client about where the boat is and where the materials are."

Mitchell said although *Vanguard* was the first mussel harvester for Q-West and it was working

with Oceantech designers Richard McBride and Kirk Mullen for the first time, its long experience and established production system worked as well as for other boat types.

"The first thing was, have we costed it correctly without having any historical data to fall back on? In the end we've done pretty much as we expected."

He was very proud of the 25-strong team that built *Vanguard*, he said, with operations manager Chass Wardle doing an "exceptionally good job".

Q-West had been lucky to have MaLab choose it over other boatbuilding companies, Mitchell said.

"Scott [Gillanders] was very knowledgeable and so was Stoney Bourke, the skipper who runs the boat, and very easy to work with, to make sure the boat could be its absolute best."

A lot of detailed work on the specifications meant that MaLab knew what it was getting for its money from the start, with no budget blow-outs.

"If they wanted something extra during the build, it was crystal clear if it was in or out, with none of that animosity that you might otherwise get – that made life very easy."

It also meant that *Vanguard* left Whanganui fully operational and was hauling mussel lines within days of arriving at Port Nelson.

Mitchell said Q-West worked hard to make the boat easy to service and maintain, with additional systems and materials to minimise corrosion and maintenance, and an emphasis on easy accessibility in the engine room.

"It's not like a pleasure boat where you hide everything behind panels. It's going to have a hard-working life and you need to make it easy to work on."



Q-West operations manager Chass Wardle (left) and chief executive Colin Mitchell with MaLab marine farming manager Scott Gillanders at the Nelson naming ceremony. Photo, Steve Hussey.

## Skipper had input too



Stoney Bourke in *Vanguard*'s wheelhouse. Photo, Tim Cuff.

*Vanguard* skipper Michael "Stoney" Bourke was glad to see Q-West incorporate his ideas into the design and fit-out of the new MaLab mussel harvester.

Bourke, who partners in the boat with MaLab through his company Tasman Bay Aquaculture, has been a part of the industry since 1985 when he joined the crew of Havelock legend Ivan Godsiff.

"I look up to him big-time. I worked with him for eight years and I like to think I run a boat like he did."

Very pleased with *Vanguard*, he particularly likes the fact that it has a proper galley away from the bridge, and the detachable safety rails that can be quickly set up on the deck when the boat is steaming anywhere.

"It's one of those safety features I've always liked the idea of."

As far as he knows they're a first on mussel boats, just like the ballast tanks which provide stability on a boat that at 70 tonnes is "quite light and quite lively" when the tanks aren't in use.

"It's a great sea boat, it performs and manoeuvres really well and when you put the ballast in it performs even better. We'll get more sea days in Tasman Bay."

It was Bourke's idea to have two seats side-by-side in the wheelhouse instead of the usual one.

"I want to be teaching people. I feel the industry is lacking in that side of things.

"You get a young fella, you just keep them on deck, they're going to leave. If you show them what they can become, put them in the wheelhouse, put them in the seat, they're going to stick around."

Other stand-out features he mentions are the bilge system, the fuel system and the set-up of the gear built by Anasco.

Bourke and his crew currently tend to 150 submerged mussel lines in Tasman and Golden Bays, holding an average of 40 tonnes each, and also carry out mussel seeding.

He said *Vanguard* was one of the biggest mussel harvesters in the South Island and offered many improvements on previous boats, but he always remembered those working onshore too.

"You can have a nice boat like this, but you've got to have the people in the factory as well.

"It's a big circle. They're part of the boat as much as me and my crew."

However, the interior finish was high quality and there was good sound insulation to make the living quarters quiet.

“People who have seen the boat have been telling us that this is where the industry needs to go – we’ve got more women coming into the workforce and the men also expect not to be living in a hovel.”

He said *Vanguard* had already prompted interest from others in the mussel industry and he saw aquaculture vessels as a strong new market for Q-West, particularly as the industry grows and moves into the open ocean.

He wanted the seafood industry to know that Q-West – which built a number of inshore fishing boats in the 1980s and ‘90s – was a good option as fleets were upgraded or enlarged.

“We’re new to the aquaculture game and we’ll be guided by the designers and the MacLabs of the world. I don’t know what the future looks like until these pioneers who are putting these farms further out start to develop that.

“The core thing is – here’s our first mussel harvester, what’s come out of that is a customer that couldn’t be happier and a boat that does exactly as it should do, and as a project everything has worked exactly as it should.”

**“A big project like that, it kind of ends up being a partnership. We wanted a vessel delivered on time and on budget, that was very important to us.”**

**– SCOTT GILLANDERS**

Q-West’s boatyard got started in the 1960s and the current business employs skilled boatbuilders who trained as far back as the 1970s.

Its works in progress include a 24-metre quad-engined vessel for long-term client Whale Watch Kaikoura, RIBs for America’s Cup police work, and pilot boats.

Projects it has completed in the past few years include a 19-metre tourist catamaran, a 16-metre crayboat, 17 and 19-metre Hamilton jet-powered catamarans for the Victoria Maritime Police and the New Zealand Customs Service, ferries for Fullers in Auckland and an 18-metre flat-deck barge for use in the Marlborough Sounds.



A birds-eye view showing the spacious deck layout.

### Vanguard’s vital statistics

Home port:	Nelson, New Zealand
Designer:	Oceantech NZ, Nelson
Builder:	Q-West Boat Builders, Whanganui
Construction material:	Marine grade aluminium
Length overall:	30.6m
Length waterline:	28.7m
Beam:	8.8m
Draught:	2.5m
Main engines:	2x Scania D113 073M
Cruise speed:	12 knots
Fuel capacity:	12,000 litres
Ballast tank capacity:	24,000 litres
Fresh water capacity:	2,000 litres
Hydraulic equipment:	Fluid Power Systems
Harvesting equipment:	AnSCO
Electronics:	Simrad (Advance Trident)

Photo, Q-West.



Vanguard’s hull was built upside down, then flipped using four cranes before construction continued inside the shed.

Generally, clients came back for another Q-West build after the first one, Mitchell said.

“We’ve got a good little business here that does a huge, diverse range of boats and every one of them goes out with a happy customer – it just happens to be boats we’re building. I guess if we were building houses, we’d have the same philosophy.”

MacLab’s Gillanders said the *Vanguard* project had received some very competitive tenders but the job

was about quality and reputation as well as price.

“A big project like that, it kind of ends up being a partnership. We wanted a vessel delivered on time and on budget, that was very important to us.”

Q-West’s boatbuilding experience allowed it to work closely with the designers to make the vessel more maintenance friendly, and through the fit-out Q-West put a lot of innovative things into the vessel to make it more maintenance free and easy to use.



Harvesting in progress.

Photo, Tim Cuff.

## COVER FEATURE



Crewman Patric Lorandi in the crew lounge and galley.

Photo, Tim Cuff.

"That's what you get when you work with a company that has so much experience – an evolution of fitting out vessels and getting better on each one that they do," Gillanders said.

*Vanguard* was designed to deliver two days' worth of processing in a day's harvest, 80 tonnes, and to be stable and safe in the open waters of Tasman and Golden bays.

Its two 12,000 litre ballast tanks are there for that reason, making *Vanguard* the first of its type in New Zealand.

"It certainly makes a big difference in terms of stability, so it's great when they're working and also when they're transiting empty."

The vessel carries a high-speed optical sorter to weed out all the marine waste from the crop it is harvesting or the spat it is seeding, and a grader to separate nutraceutical grade mussels from half-shell food grade, allowing MacLab to get more value from its crop.

The privately-owned Nelson company focuses on producing high-quality mussel powder for nutraceutical manufacture and has invested heavily in boosting production over the past two years.

Gillanders said *Vanguard* had a high standard of crew comfort, being comfortable, spacious, well-insulated and air-conditioned.

It's also good to look at inside and out.

"When we designed the vessel, we thought you can put just as much effort into making an ugly

vessel as you can an aesthetically pleasing one – we wanted to do a few things to make it not just practical but to look good too, I guess as a good showcase for our company, and our crew."

There are two crews of four working four days on, four off, sometimes overnighting in port.

Gillanders said the success of a project was measured when it came into use. After arriving in Nelson *Vanguard* spent two half-days on MacLab's mussel farm for crew training and running up some of the gear.

"On its third full day it went out, did an 80-tonne harvest in Golden Bay and delivered it to Nelson. That's a testament to Q-West, [harvesting equipment supplier] Ansco and [hydraulic systems supplier] Fluid Power Systems, but also everyone involved in the project, and the crew. It's about people's attitudes to making things happen. It was extremely pleasing for us."

When he first heard Colin Mitchell say that people who got a boat built by Q-West usually came back for the next boat, he "didn't think much of it", Gillanders said.

"But after building the boat I can see exactly what he was meaning. There's a whole range of things that Q-West are very good at."

For more, including a portfolio of completed boats, go to [Q-West.com](http://Q-West.com)