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Investing in a **bright fut**

By Jonathan Large

Atending the launch of MacLab's new state of the art vessel just before Christmas confirmed how bright the future is looking for the Greenshell mussel industry.

The Vanguard was built specifically to service the new mussel growing areas in Golden and Tasman Bays, where MacLab is involved in partnerships developing 1,150 hectares of water space.

That's more than a third of the size of marine farm space in the Marlborough Sounds. We are not really seeking much expansion in the Sounds, so the Vanguard as its name suggests, signals new investment in mussels emerging elsewhere in the Top of the South.

MacLab is very optimistic about its own growth prospects as an exclusive supplier of mussel powder to Pharmalink Extracts at Appleby for high end human and animal marine oils.

TOWARDS \$3 BILLION

This is the sort of growth that we envisage rolling out more widely under the Government's exciting new strategy to have a \$3b aquaculture industry by 2035, as unveiled last September at the Aquaculture New Zealand (AQNZ) conference.

One of the key conversations that MFA along with AQNZ will want to see developed in 2020 is how the Government plans to work with the industry to achieve the ambitious new target.



Jonathan Large (left) at the launch of the Vanguard with Tasman Mayor Tim King and Nelson MP Hon. Dr Nick Smith.

At our now annual Smart+Connected Aquaculture forum in Havelock late last year, Andy Elliot of Wakatū outlined how he wants to see mussels deliver a third - \$1b - of the total. As we are now starting to see, we can lift Greenshell production significantly and this can expand further if we get the right planning, policies and collaboration.

While the mussel industry's greatest growth opportunities now lie outside the Marlborough Sounds, the Sounds still accounts for over 60 per cent of current mussel production and will continue to provide the backbone of the industry for some years to come.

MARLBOROUGH ENVIRONMENT PLAN

That's why the expected release this month of the aquaculture provisions for the new Marlborough Environment Plan are so important. The MFA has

put a huge amount of effort in, along with Rebecca Clark from AQNZ, Graeme Coates from ADL, Ted Culley from Sanford and others. It's not been easy - and we still have the submissions and hearings process to go through - but I'm confident we're going to see better certainty for marine farmers in the Sounds as a result.

MFA has also submitted in support of NZ King Salmon's Blue Endeavour farm in Cook Strait, the first of a number the company has indicated it wishes to develop in the Open Ocean environment down the South Island's east coast.

Anyone who attended last year's Open Oceans conference in Nelson knows that these waters while challenging,

present the next big opportunity for aquaculture. Already Sanford has been working in that space off Pegasus Bay and it's exciting to now see the first salmon farm application.

3D SONAR SURVEY

Another step forward for Marlborough growers is the 3D sonar survey of the Pelorus Sound which got underway late last year. Queen Charlotte Sound was surveyed in 2016/17 and the MFA has been working with the Marlborough District Council and Land Information NZ to get Pelorus underway.

There's a huge amount of marine data that these surveys produce that's of real benefit to our members, especially as many farms come up for consent renewals.

The survey will only take place in or near marine farms if no industry vessels are present.

AT THE VANGUARD OF A GROWTH INDUSTRY

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SPAT

Spat supply and retention continue to be a major challenge for the growth of mussel farming. MFA with AQNZ launched a joint initiative last November with 30+ industry, government and science providers gathering at MFA's Blenheim offices to form a working group. MPI's representative indicated that an industry strategy is essential to secure any government funding to help resolve spat issues. AQNZ is leading this, with a key focus on funding for more spat supply and retention research and outcomes. MFA's GM Ned Wells is the point of contact for the Spat Working Group - ned@marinefarming.co.nz

I've also been travelling to Kaitiaki regularly as part of a working group formed with stakeholders for the spat collected off Te Oneroa-a-Tōhē (90 Mile Beach). I co-chair this working group with Kevin Robinson from Te Rarawa and we've identified work for this year including more science to understand the impacts of collecting spat, the need to build better relationships with the community and Iwi groups, and to develop career paths into aquaculture for Far North school leavers.

We've also adopted the name Te Hiku spat rather than Kaitiaki spat as it doesn't come from the township. Te Hiku refers to the peninsula of the Far North which Te Oneroa-a-Tōhē lies within.

I'm confident that with industry's continued involvement in the Te Oneroa-a-Tōhē Working Group, the vital resource the beach provides will contribute to the buoyant future ahead for the Greenshell mussel industry and the local Te Hiku community.

I'm starting 2020 feeling very positive for our industry. There's so much invested in the Top of the South where MFA represents marine farmers - and we are seeing the next wave of sustainable growth now starting to take effect. ■

A new state-of-the-art harvest vessel will help mussel extract producer MacLab meet growing demand for their premium powders and oils while continuing a proud family history of innovation and leadership.

The 30m Vanguard, which was designed to handle the varying conditions of Tasman and Golden Bays, can harvest up to 80 tonnes of mussels per day. It is equipped with a colour sorter and gives crew the ability to separate nutraceutical grade from food grade mussels while still at sea.

MacLab remains a family-owned business, employing around 75 staff with around 20 at Pharmalink Extracts near Richmond which MacLab exclusively supplies with the mussel powder it produces. Pharmalink converts this into oil for nutraceutical use in global brands including Lyprinol and Antinol which provide an anti-inflammatory solution for people and animals suffering from arthritis.

MacLab Financial Controller Gary Rountree told the 100 guests at the vessel launch that the Vanguard was the latest chapter in a 45-year-old story that began with a vision from Jim and Bill Broadbent.

"Over the last couple of decades, Pharmalink has continued what our founders - the Broadbent family - started: marketing the highest quality marine oils. The key to this has been the huge and ongoing investment in research which has enabled our products to lead the way," said Gary.

Positive developments occurring within Pharmalink are seeing MacLab prepare for expansion and the Vanguard is a signal of that.

"In the last two years alone, MacLab has invested \$13m to lift production - and that doesn't include the new vessel. We are poised for growth," Gary said.

"Our production jointly accounts for a high percentage of NZ mussel oil exports which are growing fast as a very high value component of overall industry returns."

MacLab sources about 7,000 tonnes of mussels - about 7 per cent of national production - from marine farms in the Marlborough Sounds, Golden and Tasman Bays which it owns or leases as well as buying mussels from other supply partners. ■

VANGUARD SPECS

- 30.6m long and 8.5m wide
- Multipurpose for all aspects of mussel farming from seeding to harvesting
- Built by Q-West Whanganui with spacious, insulated, airconditioned accommodation areas
- Ballast tanks reduce motion when empty to provide a very stable platform
- Colour sorter that works by vision scanning the material and rejecting any waste
- Ability to separate nutraceutical grade mussels and halfshell grade mussels at sea
- Operated by Michael (Stoney) Burke in partnership with MacLab

