

North Island Mussel Processor Unveils a World-First in Shellfish Processing Technology

TAURANGA, 17 June 2010: A new \$23 million mussel processing facility which will help provide the world's largest half-shell production capacity has opened in Tauranga today featuring ground-breaking technology developed right here in New Zealand.

Prime Minister, Hon. John Key officially opened North Island Mussel Processor's (NIMPL's) new factory which contains the world's first automated mussel opening (AMO) machines.

NIMPL Director Peter Vitasovich says its new state-of-the-art *Greenshell*TM mussel processing plant will see export manufacturing capacity increase nearly three-fold thanks to the new AMO technology.

"Our new Tauranga factory houses 28 automated mussel opening (AMO) machines that each process up to 3600 mussels per hour – that's more than 1.6 million mussels per 16 hour day".

"When fully operational, NIMPL will boast the world's largest capacity for half-shell production," says Vitasovich.

NIMPL chairman Geoff Burgess describes the joint venture as an innovative model for export co-operation and rationalisation, saying NIMPL will contribute to the industry's ambitious plan of making New Zealand's aquaculture sector a sustainable billion dollar industry by 2025 – a plan that has the full support of the government.

"Our ability to process this raw product in such high volumes at a lower cost base will increase New Zealand's competitiveness in overseas markets and help build a sustainable model for the future," says Burgess.

Currently NIMPL's existing factory operates with manual mussel openers – this factory will now redirect its focus on delivering value-added mussel products. The new factory (which contains the AMOs) will be mainly automated.

NIMPL is already one of Tauranga's largest employers, with a total of approximately 220 staff – 35 being permanent and the balance of 185 being seasonal staff. A further 200 seasonal staff were contracted during the transitional phase to begin processing in the new AMO factory.

Greenshell mussels are a species unique to New Zealand's pristine waters. These plump native shellfish combine a stunning iridescent green shell and are larger than their European Black Shell counterpart. Nutritionally, the New Zealand Greenshell mussel contains higher meat-to-shell ratio, protein per kilo and higher concentrations of health-giving Omega 3s.

"We are recognized here and internationally as producing healthy, high quality, environmentally sustainable aquaculture products," says Vitasovich.

Aquaculture accounts for approximately 20 percent of the value of New Zealand's total fisheries production, with Greenshell mussels being the greatest contributor to the growth of this industry.¹ Greenshell mussels represent 77 percent of the New Zealand aquaculture sector, which is worth more than \$300 million.²

¹ 2008 NZ Seafood Industry Council Export Statistics

² www.aquaculture.org.nz



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About North Island Mussel Processors Limited (NIMPL)

Incorporated in August 2005, NIMPL was established as an equal joint venture between Sanford Limited, Sealord Group Limited and Greenshell New Zealand Limited and tasked with developing a low-cost, high-volume mussel processing facility. NIMPL is a toll processor (ie the company doesn't own the product, but adds value to a raw material) for its shareholders who export Greenshell mussels around the world including United States, Asia, Europe and the Middle East.

Initial research and development for AMO was initiated in 1998 by Sanford Limited, who currently owns the patent and associated intellectual property rights. In the early stages of R&D, Sanford Limited received a government grant and partnered with Industrial Research to see the project through.

For more information visit:

www.sanford.co.nz www.sealord.co.nz
www.aquaculture.govt.nz/files/pdfs/MED_Aquaculture_doc.pdf Our Blue Horizon – New Zealand Government's commitment to Aquaculture