Finfish – Freshwater Trout

Hatchery production and value

In 2001-02, Victorian hatcheries produced 8.15 million salmonid seed stock (fingerlings). Of these, 6.09 million were ‘ongrown’ on producers’ own farms, 1.08 million sold to be ongrown on other farms, and 0.98 million provided for restocking natural water bodies for recreational purposes. The composite industry average for the size of fingerlings used for ‘growout’ was under 10 grams, while the average for those used for restocking for recreational purposes was around 100 grams. Production of the latter was valued at $489 000 in 2001-02.

In 2001-02, New South Wales commercial hatcheries produced $152 000 worth of rainbow trout fry, fingerlings and eggs. In addition to the commercial hatchery production, trout fingerlings are also produced at two NSW Fisheries hatcheries, the Gaden Trout Hatchery at Jindabyne and the L.P. Dutton Trout Hatchery at Ebor, for restocking public waters to maintain recreational fisheries.

In Western Australia, trout ova and fry from the South West Freshwater Research and Aquaculture Centre (SWFRAC) at Pemberton are sold to freshwater trout farmers, and yearlings to growers using inland saline waters.

Markets and opportunities

Marketable sizes for rainbow and brown trout range from the smallest (entree size) whole fish of approximately 210 grams to the largest fish at about 3 kilograms. The most common size is 300–400 grams for whole fish and about 100–200 grams per portion for fillets. Trout reach a market size of 400 grams in about eighteen months.

Trout are sold in a variety of forms including whole fish (gilled and gutted), smoked and fillets (Rowland 2002). The wholesale and retail network for farmed trout usually involves the sale of the product by the farmer to a wholesaler, the fish market or to frozen food distributors, and then to retailers such as restaurants, supermarkets and fish shops.

Around 50 per cent of Victorian freshwater trout is sold chilled, 25 per cent is frozen, 20 per cent is smoked and 2–3 per cent exported.

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Trout have high meat yields and command medium prices for quality fish. The reported average farm gate price in 2001-02 for trout in New South Wales was $8.05 a kilogram, while the average in Victoria was $6.72 (NSW Fisheries 2003; NRE 2002). Fresh trout has become cheaper than other prime fish such as Snapper, Mulloway and barramundi (NSW Fisheries 2001). A total of 2917 kilograms of fresh rainbow trout (205 crates) was sold through the Sydney Fish Market in 2001-02.

Outlook and risks

Most land based trout farms are on private property close to a natural waterway from which water is diverted through the farm before being discharged as effluent back into the same waterway. Restrictions on water diversion and effluent discharge may restrict further increases in production.

In Victoria, the trout sector continues to grow, but is constrained by available sites and access to suitable water (VAC 2002). Strong domestic competition has streamlined production efficiency with some of the larger producers approaching world competitive standards.

The major factors limiting trout production in Western Australia are warm water temperatures throughout much of the state and the unavailability of large volumes of cool water during summer. The solution to this limitation may lie in obtaining access to supplies of cooler water, such as by permitting access to irrigation schemes in the south west, particularly if water supplies are affected by salinity increases and are of less use to agriculture. Current initiatives include assessing the performance of yearling trout grown in cooler periods of the year in saline farm dams, and the potential for further improving the tolerance of local trout populations to high temperature by selective breeding programs (Department of Fisheries 1999). On an experimental basis, sea cage trials have been undertaken in Fremantle in more protected inshore waters.

Inland saline farming trials based on growing yearling rainbow trout to table size have been promising and may help the industry recover to earlier production peaks of more than 40 tonnes a year. However, production is still rainfall dependent and profitability not established. Except for niche marketing, trout prices in Western Australia

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are restricted by competition from large-scale producers, particularly those in Victoria, and by international prices for farmed salmonids (trout and salmon).

Industry associations

The main freshwater trout industry association is the Australian Trout and Salmon Farmers Association in Victoria.

(REF. Australian Aquaculture. Industry profiles for selected species)