



**Seafood Industry Partners' Project  
(SIPP) 2011 Retreat: Connecting Early  
Career Researchers with the Australian  
Seafood Industry Through Meaningful  
Coaching Partnerships – Year 3**

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**Project No. 2011/737**





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*Front Cover Image – One of the unique dishes developed during the Seafood Challenge at SIPP 2011.  
Photo: Mark Oliver*

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## Non-Technical Summary

### **2011/751 - Seafood Industry Partners' Project (SIPP) 2011 Retreat: Connecting Early Career Researchers with the Australian Seafood Industry Through Meaningful Coaching Partnerships – Year 3**

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#### **OBJECTIVES:**

- Develop, implement and continuously improve a CRC mentoring program
- Develop training for mentors and early career scientists.
- Provide industry connection and create new industry experiences for early career scientists.
- Provide additional opportunities for connection between all industry mentors, early careers scientists and CRC staff.

#### **NON TECHNICAL SUMMARY:**

##### **OUTCOMES ACHIEVED TO DATE**

- 16 PhD students, 3 Masters by Research and 1 Post-Doctoral Research Scientists participated in SIPP 2011.
- 8 industry mentors actively participated in SIPP 2011.
- 5 chefs actively participated in SIPP 2011.
- 4 interactive workshops with hand out materials.
- 1 major group *seafood challenge* conducted over two days.

**KEYWORDS:** SIPP, mentoring, coaching, training

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- Craig Foster – Clean Seas Tuna
- Mark Boulter – Sydney Fish Market
- Fiona Baxter – Sydney Seafood School
- Rod Missen - EcoFish
- Helen Jenkins – Australian Prawn Farmers' Association
- Ben Smith – Australian Bight Abalone
- Jared Ingersol – Cotton Duck Restaurant
- Alex Kearns – Glebe Point Diner
- Adriano Zumbo - Adriano Zumbo Patisserie
- Stewart Wesson – Culinetic
- Mark Churchett – Cowell Area School Oyster Manager
- Neil MacGuffie – WA Fishing Industry Council

This year's SIPP requires two special acknowledgements. Firstly, a very special thank you to Cole Thomas - Executive Chef, Culinetic and Proprietor of Culinary Solutions, as it was only through his vision and focus that the Seafood CRC was able to attract such high quality, world renowned chefs to SIPP 2011. The second acknowledgement goes to Nigel Cocks of Sydney Fish Market. Nigel was at the coalface of organising SIPP 2011 and he was the reason it all went so smoothly.



The always effervescent Cole Thomas assisting his group to create a truly unique seafood dish.  
*Photo: Mark Oliver*

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 What is the SIPP?

The Seafood CRC's Education and Training Program has a strong end-user focus and needs to ensure "industry ready" graduates enter the Australian seafood industry at the completion of their candidature. The desire to develop the capabilities of both young researchers and industry participants is a strong and major driving force in the Seafood CRC.

As such, research students and post doctoral research scientists (termed early career scientists in this report) will be part of a program that enhances their pathway into further seafood research or industry careers. This program is called the Seafood Industry Partners Project (or SIPP) and usually takes the form of a yearly training "retreat".

As part of the early career scientist's involvement with SIPP, higher-degree students and early career scientists are co-supervised and mentored (or managed in the case of the post doctoral research scientist's) by industry members called "project partners" (industry mentors). From experience with SIPP 2009, it was discovered that commitment from industry personnel to undergo formal mentoring arrangements with early career scientists is difficult and so the CRC now adopts a "roving" industry mentor program to each retreat.

SIPP also ensures early career scientists gain industry and market place experience as well as CRC industry participants benefiting from CRC research and training. This will strengthen mechanisms for the broader CRC community to adopt CRC innovations and to develop a skill-based culture within industry.

The CRC's SIPP program also allows strong linkages, with all aspects of industry, and presents opportunities for researchers to gain practical knowledge of the seafood industry first hand and to develop new skills, including business and marketing that will improve their prospects of subsequent employment. SIPP also aims to build stronger networks across all sectors. Incentives, training and practical support will encourage candidates to complete their qualifications on time and be in a better position to take up employment in the industry.

The participation of industry members as mentors will address opportunities for improving skills of industry people with a view to contributing to the growth of industry participant organisations. It will also create a culture of collaborative research.

The Seafood CRC SIPP program was developed by extensive consultation through the CRC bid process with industry partners. This was detailed at the final interview for the "bid" process and was considered to be an excellent initiative. Final endorsement of the initiative was achieved from DIISR in 2007 and at the third year review in 2011.

## 1.2 Need

Disconnection between research and industry is a common issue of concern and it is considered that this lack of disconnect leads to lack of communication about research needs from industry and poor adoption of CRC research outcomes. Consultation with industry has also resulted in the need for more industry-ready graduates. Industry wants graduates who have a deeper understanding and connection with the Australian seafood industry and understand more thoroughly the nature and the challenges industry face in all facets of their business.

In addition, there is a need to improve communication and cooperation between industry and research providers and vice versa. The need to develop this is highlighted by the necessity for industry to become more innovative and to understand the importance of research and development to maintain a leading and competitive edge.

The CRC SIPP program assists in improving that process by enabling opportunities for industry and researchers to understand each other's views, challenges and promote better communication on ideas and projects.

## 1.3 Objectives

- Develop, implement and continuously improve on a CRC mentoring program.
- Develop training for mentors and early career scientists.
- Provide industry connection and create new industry experiences for early career scientists.
- Provide additional opportunities for connection between all industry mentors, early careers scientists and CRC staff.



*Seafood CRC Program Manager Graham Mair taking a hands on role in the preparation of a squid ink sauce during the SIPP 2011 retreat. Photo: Mark Oliver*

## 2. Methods

SIPP 2011 was more challenging in terms of organisation and logistics than in previous years. The central theme for SIPP 2011 was post-harvest orientated with a sizeable focus on seafood meal development, preparation, cooking and presentation. There was a collective acknowledgement that primary producers and research scientists rarely have exposure to the individuals who prepare and serve the products they are either growing or researching. Allowing a platform for interaction between these two ends of the seafood chain allows for a greater understanding of end user trends and needs. This type of information is invaluable for primary producers and research scientists as the products they are producing or researching need to meet or exceed the expectations of the public.

This theme allowed for a group of world class chefs to be part of SIPP 2011 in addition to early career scientists, mentors and Seafood CRC staff. The Seafood CRC secured the Sydney Seafood School located at SFM as the venue for the *Seafood Challenge* while all of the other workshops and experience were within the SFM complex. SIPP 2011 consisted of:

**A Welcome Lunch** - An informal meet and greet followed by a one minute overview by each participants around their research and/or career.

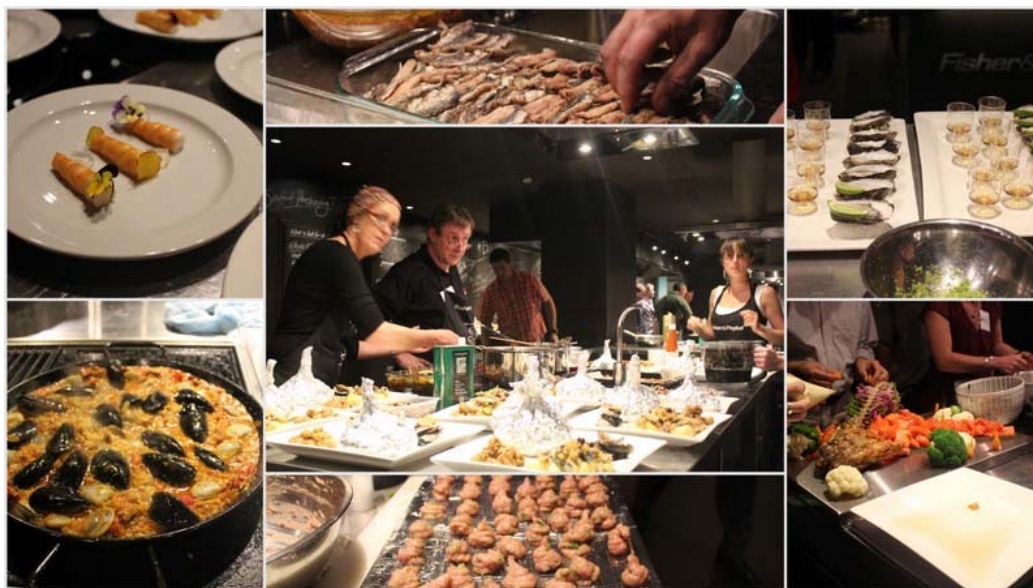
**Product Development Workshop** – Karen McNaughton Senior Seafood Technologist, SARDI highlighted her role as a seafood technologist both in Australia and internationally and talked about the process of seafood product development. During the course of the discussion she outlined some hallmarks of successful products as well as some which have not reached expectations.

**Seafood Quality Index Workshop** – Mark Boulter, Quality Assurance Manager of SFM conducted an interactive workshop around the use of the Seafood Quality Index Tool which is used to evaluate seafood quality in terms of sensory changes over time and temperature.

**Seafood Through the Eyes of a Chef** – **Cole Thomas**, Executive Chef of Culnetic and Proprietor of Culinary Solutions gave an insight into how chefs view and use seafood in their restaurants. Cole also sought comment from all chefs at SIPP 2011 during his presentation.

**The Seafood Challenge** – The major activity for SIPP 2011 involved groups of around 6 individuals including students, industry mentors, CRC staff and chefs. Their brief was to conceptualise, design, budget, prepare, market, cook and serve an innovative sized seafood meal to 40 patrons with a budget of \$500.00. This challenge gave the groups a high level of autonomy with their ingredients and from this some truly unique meals were created. All ingredients were purchased from the retail space at SFM and all preparation and cooking was undertaken at the Sydney Seafood School, situated on the same premises as SFM. Meals were served in a fine dining area adjacent to the Sydney Seafood School. A montage of the meals are below:





*A selection of unique dishes created during the Seafood Challenge.*

*Top left: Prawn desert with toffee beetroot and edible flowers. Top Middle: Preparation of a sardine dish. Top Right: Oysters and green ginger wine entrée. Bottom Left: Seafood Paella Middle: The finished product ready to be served. Bottom Left: Minced carp 'bights'. Bottom Right: Gin infused trout with assorted vegetables*

It was also expected that beyond cooking the product, groups had to have intimate product knowledge such as: provenance, harvest/culture method, species information, product storage and handling, cooking methods and any other facts a consumer may seek. This information was presented to all participants when the meals were served.

**Working Dinner** - It was an opportunity for groups to continue to discuss ideas and concepts throughout the night.

**Tour of the Sydney Fish Market Auction Floor** – Participants witnessed first-hand the Dutch auction system at SFM. There was also an opportunity to be guided through a range of seafood products while listening to relevant information from the SFM guides.

**Intellectual Property Workshop** – This workshop was jointly facilitated by University of Tasmania's intellectual property specialist Robin Fieldhouse and the Seafood CRCs Graham Mair. In the first session Robin Fieldhouse highlighted the legal processes of intellectual property, while in the second session Graham Mair gave a real life example of an intellectual property experience he was involved in over a long time period.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Feedback Statistics

This chapter of the final report describes the outcomes of the feedback survey where participants were able to select from strongly agree, agree, neither or not applicable, disagree and strongly disagree to a number of questions related to the retreat.

#### 3.1.1 Statistics arising from the SIPP 2011 feedback survey:

- 89.5% of SIPP participants strongly agreed that SIPP 2011 was a valuable experience for them to feel part of the Seafood CRC. 10.5 % said they agreed and 0% said neither or not applicable.
- 63% strongly agreed, 37% agreed and 0% said not applicable that SIPP was a valuable experience for them to be able to connect with the wider seafood industry.
- 74% strongly agreed, 26% agreed and 0% said not applicable that SIPP was a valuable experience for them to be able to connect with Seafood CRC staff and Program Managers.
- 84% strongly agreed and 16% agreed that SIPP 2010 provided a valuable experience to meet other early career scientists and industry.
- 84% strongly agreed, 16% agreed and 0% said neither/not applicable that SIPP 2011 provided an opportunity to expand my knowledge about the Australian seafood industry through the planned activities and experiences.
- 89.5% strongly agreed and 10.5% agreed that they were satisfied with SIPP 2011.

### 3.2 Feedback Comments – Favourite Part of SIPP 2011

When prompted to respond to what was their favourite part of SIPP 2011, the comments received were:

- The seafood challenge
- The cooking project was fun and because we had a lot of spare time around our cooking I got a chance to talk to both industry and the chef a lot which was very valuable
- The “out of water” side of the CRC (i.e. marketing, end-user, product quality). Meeting the chefs was great and learning more about what drives food choices in restaurants was fascinating
- I loved the chance to interact with the chefs and other students. Designing a meal and cooking it was a whole lot of fun

- The mentors and the industry
- The IP presentation
- I thoroughly enjoyed the planning and cooking experience with my group and Chef Alex Kearns
- The chef's participation
- The cooking contest
- The fish market tour and the interactive activity (buying fish etc.)
- Group cooking with the chefs. Seeing their passion for their work.
- Opportunity to see, cook with and eat a diverse range of seafood in innovative ways
- The group cooking activities. Also a great opportunity for me to meet and interact with other students which I would not ordinarily get
- The Sydney Seafood Cooking School
- Cooking with our professional chefs and learning cooking tips from them. Group assignments
- All of Day 2 from markets to food preparation and presentation by a team of lovely people
- The chef topic

### **3.3 Feedback Comments - Strengths of SIPP 2011**

Specific comments received when asked what where the strengths of SIPP 2011 retreat were:

1. Having the chefs around
2. Well organized and working with the chefs was good – it's a side of the industry that can sometimes go forgotten
3. Talking to chefs and learning about their experiences and finding out their passion and thoughts about seafood, how they use it and what they know about seafood. From a PhD background in sustainable seafood it was valuable to voice my opinions to these chefs on my knowledge and opinions about sustainable seafood
4. Emily and Mark you put it together so well. The chefs were inspirational and the people attending were great
5. Organised, informative, fun, challenging and very interactive
6. Excellent hands on activities – doing things that I haven't done before
7. Group activities
8. I really felt that working in groups this year helped to get people mixing really well. It forced people to mix with others they probably wouldn't have. I also really enjoyed working and hearing from the chefs.
9. The team work and getting to know each other better
10. The group interaction. All the crew staying in the same place and facilities were well located (for logistic purposes)

11. Quality industry reps, real industry contact, very creative and original format and it was much improved on from last year
12. Access to external participants (i.e. chefs). Different perspective from these people. Great insight.
13. Excellent way for students, industry, CRC, chefs to interact. The team challenge was a great way to get everyone motivated and interact with each other. The seafood tour was a great way to see a huge range of seafood and get tips on how to assess its quality. Graham Mair's IP talk was surprisingly not too bad and relevant.
14. I was very impressed how smoothly the complicated schedule ran. Well done. The IP talks were very helpful.
15. Getting hands on. I think the SIPP retreat has improved this year and each year and it is a great way to promote interaction between students and industry in a less formal environment.
16. The group activities for sure
17. The People: The CRC management team for organization and planning. The Chefs: for participation and effort. The Students and the Industry: A great group of humble and intelligent people. In General: Everyone's willingness to be involved
18. Meeting new people. Workshopping issues (e.g. quality index) and interaction with chefs

### **3.4 Feedback Comments –Least Favourite Part of SIPP 2011**

The specific comments received when promoted to consider their least favourite part of SIPP 2011 were:

1. The breakfast pack and the intellectual property talk
2. The early morning
3. Rather than seminars (as informative as they were), I would prefer to split into new groups and do something hands on
4. Waiting to get into the kitchen
5. Enjoyed all of it except maybe the 6am start
6. Walking from the hotel to the fish market
7. Booking the accommodation and difficulties getting the group discount
8. The IBIS hotel
9. The breakfast box and not being able to go to the aquarium
10. It was too short and not enough time to absorb more of the market culture, fisheries information and species (I recently arrived into the country so I could have spent longer)

### **3.5 Feedback Comments – Ideas to Improve the SIPP Retreat Experience**

When asked for ways the CRC could improve the SIPP retreat experience the following feedback was given:

1. I think this year was really good with all the hands on stuff
2. It would have been excellent for more industry members to attend these events. We can understand the time difficulties but particularly for this retreat, producers would benefit immensely from face to face conversations with chefs who are the end-users of their products!!!!
3. Split into new groups and do something hands on rather than seminars
4. Just keep doing what you're doing!
5. You are doing a great job. Thanks
6. Tours of small companies
7. Somehow find a way to interact closer with everyone at the start
8. Keep it interactive
9. More seafood consumption during the retreat
10. More time to mingle with participants in an unstructured environment (i.e. not enough time to meet everyone)
11. More industry people. Get aquaculture and fishing people to speak

### **3.6 Feedback Comments – Ideas for SIPP 2011**

When questioned if any of the participants had some ideas the CRC could implement for SIPP 2011, a myriad of suggestions were received. Although some either logistically impossible or too cost inhibitive other more tangible suggestions included:

1. Tasmania – road trip visiting commercial facilities and feed mills
2. Perth and surrounds
3. Darwin
4. Kangaroo Island
5. A commercial fishing vessel or charter vessel for the whole retreat

## 4. Discussion

What set SIPP 2011 apart from previous retreats was its uniqueness. It was universally acknowledged that no individual attending SIPP 2011 had an experience like the seafood challenge. It was this type of environment where opportunities for real learning and personal growth flourished. All participants felt they were part of something special which allowed for early-careers scientists to feel as though they are a part of the Seafood CRC which in turn made it easier for them to connect and get to know the CRC Program Managers and all the industry mentors. This is especially important when you consider that CRC early career scientists are scattered throughout Australia and often have little help financially to attend other CRC events such as the twice yearly planning and reporting forms and other functions. This reiterates that it is important to continue to provide the \$1000 mentoring costs per year for students to ensure traction with future SIPP events and their mentors.

It came through very strongly in the feedback survey that the chefs played a crucial part in SIPP 2011. The length of time that individuals and groups had with world class chefs went beyond an intensive learning experience to a more extended opportunity to really understand how chefs treat seafood and truly appreciate the challenges and opportunities they face on a day to day basis. This opportunity also was reversed and the chefs all felt they had a greater understanding of the Australian Seafood Industry and its products by the completion of SIPP 2011.

There was a very strong, positive reaction to the seafood challenge. All participants agreed that this was an integral part of the retreat for both early career scientists and the industry mentors to discover a different facet of the seafood industry they may not have had exposure to in the past. Having participants actively engage in a creative process that culminated into having their creations come to fruition proved a great success. During this process participants gained exposure to species they were unfamiliar with and gained an appreciation for the utilisation of parts of seafood species that may be traditionally discarded. The success of the seafood challenge by its very size and scope was considered essential because many of the other learning revolved around it. Careful planning was the key and if future SIPPs have one major learning component, getting it right is the only option.

The training workshops were also highly regarded. The participants identified Seafood Quality Index Tool workshop as an excellent experience which was mainly due to the hands on nature of the workshop. It was a form of sensory learning that has proven successful in the past. The intellectual property workshop conducted on the last day was well received considering it was on the last day after an exhausting 14 hour day prior. It was also the only workshop that did not have a post-harvest theme, so essentially it stood out on its own.

It was pleasing to discover that those who had been to SIPP 2010 and were able to compare the quality and relevance of SIPP 2011 activities with those of 2010, all agreed that the activities and experiences offered in 2011 were of the highest quality and managed extremely well. There was a collective acknowledgement that truly world class chefs were sourced for the retreat and the venue also was the best Australia had to offer. It was also pleasing to see that the majority of people attending SIPP 2011 would like to attend SIPP 2012 (industry included).

The top 5 learning's and suggestions that came from the feedback survey that can be integrated in to the planning and activities of SIPP 2011 were:

1. Keep the level of organisation high but make it challenging enough for groups or individuals to think for themselves and not hold their hand.
2. Highlight interesting area of the seafood industry that participants may not have had a great deal of exposure to.
3. Continue with hands on activities and make them enjoyable.
4. Allow a greater environment for industry and researcher interactions.
5. Have a greater number of industry participants.



*The Seafood Challenge was a very busy time indeed for all participants. Photo: Mark Oliver*

## 5. Benefits and Adoption

A number of benefits have arisen as part of SIPP 2011:

**Short term benefits:** Early career scientist and industry cohort, specific training courses and training resources developed. Dialogue commenced between Seafood CRC participants, industry mentors and a cohort of Australia's finest chefs.

**Medium term benefits:** Increased leadership and general skills of students, post doctoral research scientists, emerging career scientists and industry personnel.

**Long term benefits:** More graduates and early career scientists having a connection with the seafood industry and understanding how their research contributes to industry benefits and the food industry. The Australian seafood industry has a greater understanding of the benefits of CRC research and hence, the benefit is an improved adoption rate of technology and new information.

## 6. Further Development

Plans for SIPP 2012 can be further developed in line with feedback received from participants as outlined on from page 10. Key developments to continue for 2012 and beyond include to continue with the provision of a bursary for industry to take part (airfares and accommodation), ensuring field trips to visit industry remain as an integral part of the SIPP program and ensuring more interactive activities take place. The challenge will be to get more industry personnel taking part. A strategy may be conducting a formal request for ideas four months before the retreat to get industry committed.

## 7. Planned Outcomes

### ***Public Benefit Outcomes***

- Early career scientists with global knowledge of the seafood industry and specific sectors
- Link graduating students with positions in the seafood industry or universities.
- Retention of graduated students remaining in the seafood industry.

### ***Private Benefit Outcomes***

- Ability for early career scientists to effectively communicate with industry about R&D enabling industry to value benefit.
- Confidence and communication skills promoting industry ready graduates.
- Industry mentors and mentees gain new skills.
- Training courses delivered.

### ***Linkages with CRC Milestone Outcomes***

This project fits within strategy 1 of the A,B, Sea theme business plan and is specific to the following milestones:

- Initial students recruited, inducted and paired with appropriate industry mentors (Milestones 3.1.2 and 3.6.1)
- Students gain PhDs and selected students embark on career pathways in seafood (Milestones 3.1.3 and 3.6.2)



These outcomes relate to developing and coordinating a comprehensive PhD, Masters and Honours program with a strong industry context across all CRC themes.

## **8. Conclusion**

In conclusion, SIPP 2011 was a successful initiative for early career scientist and industry training and encouraging a young scientist cohort with links to industry. It also achieved important connections with the Seafood CRC organisation and CRC staff. The greatest challenge is to ensure that each retreat builds on quality from the last and with the enormous success of SIPP 2011 planning must begin early for SIPP 2012 in order to reach these expectations.



*Seafood CRC PhD student Lindsey Woolley blending a mystery seafood concoction at the Sydney Seafood School. Photo: Mark Oliver*