



Photo credit: ©iananderick, Western Australian Fishing Industry Council

# The world is taking note of Western Australian octopus

The demand for high-quality, sustainably sourced seafood is at an all-time high and local fisheries are leading the way.

Western Australia's octopus fishery has become the first in the southern hemisphere to be certified to the prestigious Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) standard for sustainable fishing — the highest level of sustainability a fishery can achieve.

MSC Industry Project Leader Guy Leyland said having the MSC certification is of huge benefit, particularly as Western Australian octopus is in demand globally including in Western

Europe, North America and in luxury markets throughout South East Asia.

"These markets, as well as our local market, want to make sure that our fish stocks are being sustainably and responsibly harvested," Mr Leyland said.

"The luxury market is very picky in terms of what they take. Western Australia's produce is relatively small volume but very high quality, so we are well positioned to supply global luxury seafood markets."

Restaurants around the world are taking note.





Restaurants around the world are taking note of Western Australia's high-quality octopus.

*"Chefs love it. It's quite a spectacular dish, with a lot of theatre in the presentation of an octopus,"*

- Marine Stewardship Council Project Leader Guy Leyland



A superb octopus dish created by chef Nic Wood for award-winning Perth restaurant Santini Bar & Grill.

Photo credit: Abrolhos Octopus



## The steep rise of the Western Australian octopus industry

Octopus that was once only thought to be good for bait is now considered a delicacy around the world.

The main species targeted in Western Australia, known as *Octopus cf. tetricus*, is considered to be the best eating octopus because of its taste, colour and texture.

As a result, customers cannot get enough and a major challenge for the industry is meeting growing local and international demand, particularly from the United States of America, Singapore, Hong Kong and Dubai.

With the new MSC blue tick of sustainability, and at the top of its game, the relatively new Western Australian octopus fishery is poised to meet this challenge with strong growth and the potential for a steep rise in the volumes fished.

The current annual catch off Western Australia's coast is more than 250 tonnes per year, but the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development has said 1,000 to 2,000 tonnes could be sustainably caught each year.

New locally designed traps have also been trialled in the fishery to help improve efficiency and continue the successful story behind this highly sought species.

"The chefs love it. It's quite a spectacular dish, with a lot of theatre in the presentation of an octopus," Mr Leyland said.

With 12 MSC certified fisheries, Western Australia is a global leader for sustainability and the protection of marine ecosystems.

This is no small feat given the certification process can take up to 18 months with a strict assessment criteria that includes ensuring the fishery is sustainable, has minimal environmental impact, is well managed and complies with all relevant laws.



Left to right: Fremantle Octopus Managing Director Glenn Wheeler, Comtrade International Chief Executive Officer Scott Evans and Fremantle Octopus General Manager Emma Davison. Photo credit: Western Australian Fishing Industry Council

# Get to know: Fremantle Octopus

One company involved in the MSC certification process was Fremantle Octopus, which supplies some of the top restaurants in the world including Rockpool, Australia and La Pulperia in New York.

Fremantle Octopus Managing Director Glenn Wheeler spoke about the uniqueness of Western Australia's seafood industry.

## What was the inspiration behind starting the business, Fremantle Octopus?

Fremantle Octopus was predominantly started to find a solution for a by-catch in the western rock lobster industry.

## What do you love most about the Western Australian seafood industry?

The people are passionate about what they do and how they do it.





Photo credit: @iananderick, Western Australian Fishing Industry Council



### **What makes the industry competitive and unique?**

Western Australia is unique and we, as primary producers, are in a privileged position to be able to deliver some of the most premium and sought-after seafood in the world.

### **Why is Western Australia's seafood rated among the best in the world?**

Our coastline is 20,781 kilometres (including islands), which is one-third of Australia's total coastline. The quality of the pristine waters and range of climates provide perfect conditions for any species of seafood to flourish in and around our waters. We are well positioned to be able to provide premium seafood all year round.

### **How fresh is the product before you export it?**

Even if you don't live in Western Australia you are still getting the octopus as fresh as if you did live here. Once caught, the head is removed and then 'snap frozen' into bulk 10-kilogram cartons

or one kilogram hands. The octopus is frozen for at least 2 weeks, this is what tenderises the octopus.

### **You have started exporting to China, where does your product go?**

Currently 10% of our product is sold into Asia, principally Singapore, and we have just sent our first shipment to a newly appointed distributor in Shanghai.

### **What are your predictions for the next 10 years for Western Australia's sustainable fisheries?**

We believe that with growing concerns over bio-security, social responsibility and the impact of overfishing, consumers are wanting to make global changes with their purchasing power. As governance increases over transparency to consumers, not just in retail but also in restaurants, cafes and fast-food outlets, trends will change and the demand will continue to grow for our natural wild-caught resource.



Above left to right: Abrolhos Octopus Director Dom O'Callaghan and Chief Executive Officer Adrian Hobbs.

Left: The Abrolhos Islands, a pristine fishing ground.  
Photo credit: Abrolhos Octopus

# Western Australia's Abrolhos octopus is enjoyed around the world

Based in Geraldton, over 400 kilometres north of Perth, Western Australia's Abrolhos Octopus is the only large-scale vertically integrated octopus fishing company in Australia.

Abrolhos Octopus has its own licence and a fleet of high-tech, twin-engine fishing vessels, giving its team access to shallow coastal areas and up to 80 kilometres offshore around the Abrolhos Islands.

The company developed an advanced trap that ensures no by-catch, no ghost fishing and no harm to the animals. Its quest to be as eco-friendly as possible contributed to the fishery being certified sustainable by the MSC.

Since beginning fishing in 2018, Abrolhos Octopus has quickly gained attention from chefs around Australia and the world.

The catch is delivered immediately to the company's processing facilities on the harbour's edge, reducing the time between being caught and being processed. This ensures the quality of the octopus is of a high standard.

Once packed, Abrolhos octopus is ready to be shipped to local and international customers, with the company currently exporting to more than 10 countries worldwide.

