



Covid-19: Australian Seafood Risks

Monday 16 March 2020

OVERVIEW

This industry briefing note provides:

- A situation analysis of Covid-19 outbreak in Australia;
- Exploration of current and potential impacts on the Australian seafood industry, including a call for intelligence from industry participants; and
- Key messages for industry;
- Detail on industry response activities undertaken and planned.

BACKGROUND

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses known to cause respiratory infections. These can range from the common cold to more serious diseases such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS).

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) global pandemic is a fluid situation, that is impacting all aspects of our lives, with varying impacts across Australia and the world. It is important people seek the best, most up to date information:

- The Australian Department of Health updates the [‘Health Alert’ page](#) every day with the latest medical advice and official reports.
- For questions about testing or the welfare of people with the virus, contact your [state or territory health authority](#).
- The Australian Health Protection Principal Committee makes decisions on immigration and travel policies to manage international health risks on behalf of the Australian Government.
- Australians travelling overseas are encouraged to regularly review the [Smartraveller website](#) and subscribe for updates.
- The Coronavirus Health Information Line is available to call 24hrs, 7 days per week for information on Coronavirus 1800 020 080.

The information below is from <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-frequently-asked-questions>

Global spread – As at 16 March, there have been more than 169,000 confirmed cases of coronavirus and more than 6,500 reported deaths.

Australian cases – As at 16:00 hrs on 16 March 2020, there are around 300 confirmed cases of coronavirus (COVID-19), including 5 deaths, in Australia. Sources of each case are outline by the Department of Health online.

Travel advice – Australians should consult the [Smartraveller website](#) and subscribe for updates or call the Coronavirus Health Information Line 1800 020 080 for advice.

Animal exposure – The World Organisation for Animal Health and the Australian Veterinary Association have confirmed Covid-19 virus has an animal source but that the current spread is a result of human to human transmission and no evidence that livestock can contract or spread the disease.

Eating seafood did not start the coronavirus epidemic. The CDC believes the origin of the virus is

from (live) animal-to-person spread. Many foods were present at the live animal market believed to be at the epicenter of the first outbreak, but it is not suggested that eating products from that market caused the spread.

Reputational risk – Given the global extent of the spread and presence in all significant seafood producing regions, there is no elevated risk for the Australian seafood industry or Australian products in particular.

Supply chain – informal reports have indicated shortages of some goods primarily sourced from China, including herbicides and urea – possibly exacerbated by recent rainfall stimulating on farm activity – as well as packaging supplies.

Seafood demand – see details in trade and markets briefing note attached (page 6). Overall, there has been only modest impact on domestic demand and supply in the region, with some demand tinned or frozen products being stimulated by pantry stocking.

Export access – Globally freight has been impacted – both ocean and air. In particular, the Chinese market has seen major impacts. Limited airfreight space is available, but report indicate it is at a premium. China's ports are slowly returning to normal operations following congestion caused by internal distribution networks being disrupted and labour limitations. However, typically securing shipping space could be arranged in a matter of days, the backlog now means exporters are having to book space well in advance. It could be up to 3 months before this situation resolves assuming the situation continues to improve in China.

Impact on global commodity prices – It is still too early to speculate on the full effect the Coronavirus will have on export markets. Seafood prices have been impacted across the globe with the imports and exports from China limited. Some trade has all but stopped in some countries, and prices are generally down amid fears and restrictions on movement of consumers. These price revisions are driven by market sentiment, rather than substantiated shifts to demand, however, some prices have not fallen as much as expected. While total volume of exported product has decreased, again primarily driven by China.

Longer term impacts in China – China is one of the world's largest importer of seafood and seafood products (in particular for Australia Lobster and Abalone) and any significant impact on the Chinese economy is likely to have flow-on effect on import demand for all types of products. As the virus continues to be centred around the Hubei province, other regions are reportedly slowly and unevenly returning to normal. This is encouraging as it could minimise the overall impact on the Chinese economy. The quicker the outbreak can be contained, the smaller the impact on overall trade is likely to be.

Impact on food service – the food service industry both in Australia and globally are suffering due to restrictions on public gatherings and travel. At present almost half of the Chinese population under some form of quarantine restriction, many restaurants and stores have closed as people are avoiding crowded spaces. Yum Brands (owner of KFC and Pizza hut) has allegedly closed 30% of their stores in China which is likely to impact demand for cheese. The food service sector is the most affected so far and the length of the disruption will be key when determining the full impact of the virus for the seafood industry.

Employment impacts – domestically, all businesses are looking at how best to prepare for potential staff with COVID-19. This primarily revolves around improved hygiene and cleaning, working from home (where applicable) through to putting in place isolation periods for key staff to ensure they do not get infected. Key risks identified revolve around staff in remote location or that are at sea for periods of time.

Coronavirus has now been detected in over 80 countries. With some quarantine measures in place, and heightened concerns around travel, international air traffic has been impacted. Major airlines have cancelled connections as people are reportedly more hesitant to travel. This is likely to affect tourism in Australia but could potentially also impact availability of overseas workers.

Food safety – FSANZ is reporting that previous experience with outbreaks of illness due to

MERS-CoV, SARS-CoV and other respiratory viruses (e.g. avian influenza) suggest that novel coronavirus may have been transmitted from animals to humans. However, transmission through food is unlikely and there is no evidence of this occurring with novel coronavirus to date.

Investigations to identify the source of the outbreak, the extent of spread of the infection, and mode(s) of transmission are continuing. FSANZ will continue to monitor developments and liaise with the Department of Health, the Department of Agriculture, state and territory health authorities and international counterparts to assess the possibility of foodborne transmission of the virus. The National Fisheries Institute in the United States have developed the [Seafood Safety and Covid19 website](#) which provides some helpful information, frequently asked questions (with great authoritative references from international food safety authorities) and key messages, all focused on seafood safety and Covid19.

INDUSTRY RESPONSE

Government and Fisheries Agencies across Australia are all looking at the issue – both internally and externally. Each jurisdiction is looking at the options for assisting industry to deal with and survive the pandemic. For information on assistance being put forward stakeholders are encouraged to contact their relevant agencies.

- **Industry communications** – Seafood Industry Australia (SIA) are collating information about the impact of the increased freight costs on seafood businesses. Please click on the [link here](#) and let SIA know how your business is being impacted. This information will help inform government policies and particularly the development of business assistance packages.

KEY MESSAGES FOR INDUSTRY

Key messages 1: What is it?

- Coronavirus are a large family of viruses. The new strain which has emerged is being referred to by WHO as Covid-19. Common symptoms of the disease include a fever, cough and difficulty breathing. Severe cases can cause pneumonia, and even death.
- People who might have been in contact with a confirmed case are being asked to self-isolate for 14 days, because symptoms can first appear up to 14 days after contracting the virus.
- More resources are available from the [Department of Health](#).

Key Messages 2: How do I stay updated?

- To stay up-to-date as to how to best protect yourself against Covid-19, please check-out [these resources](#) from the Department of Health.
- If you are employing people, have a look at [these resources](#) with advice for employers
- To stay up-to-date about travel restrictions, please check out the [Department of Health's website](#) or the [Smartraveller website](#)

Key Messages 3: Consider business impacts

- Consider how Covid-19 and containment measures could impact your seafood business and make contingency plans, including:
 - Protecting your staff from exposure - consider international visitors, people returning from overseas from [at risk areas](#), and [consider self-isolation](#) if staff unwell.
 - How you would operate with limited labour due to staff having to self-isolate following travel or closure of schools or childcare
 - What goods (e.g. chemicals) do you rely on to keep your business going in the coming 3-4 months and which ones are imported, particularly from China? Contact suppliers to secure goods or source alternatives.

MEDIA

- The most appropriate spokespeople for industry will be determined by the nature/subject of the inquiry.
- Where enquiries relate to commercial impacts on fishers or impacts from a farmer perspective, these will be referred to Seafood Industry Australia through Jess McInerney for response - jessica@seafoodindustryaustralia.com.au
- For responses on Fisheries Management and industry assistance contact fisheries management agencies in your state.
- Where enquiries relate to industry data, quantitative trade and export market impacts, demand and supply changes etc., these will be referred to FRDC for response – peter.horvat@frdc.com.au.

CONTACT

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For reference, this briefing note has been sent to a broad list of national, state and regional industry stakeholders. The content within this industry briefing is based on publicly available information. Please advise if you want anyone added to this distribution list. See following pages for attachments.

DETAILED SITUATION ANALYSIS

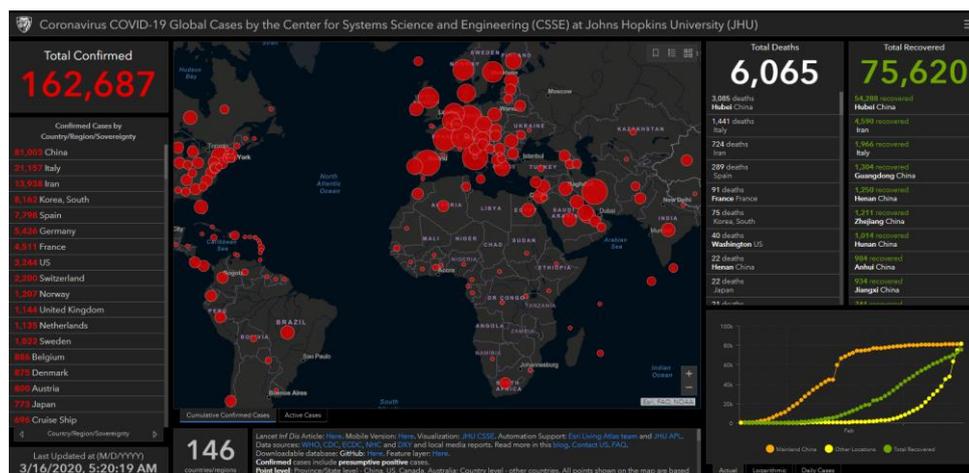
The ongoing threat of Coronavirus presents and threat not only to regional trade and markets, but should the spread continue at the current pace, could impact business continuity through labour constraints and supply chain challenges.

Global status

Across the world, the number of COVID-19 cases continues to climb. There have been many thousands of confirmed cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) and over 6,000 reported deaths.

The best source of up to date data on COVID-19 is via **Coronavirus COVID-19 Global Cases by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) at Johns Hopkins University (JHU)**

<https://www.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/bda7594740fd40299423467b48e9ecf6>



Australian Disease Status

- The Australian Department of Health updates this [‘Health Alert’ page](#) every day with the latest medical advice and official reports.
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Animal exposure

- According to the Australian Veterinary Association, current evidence suggests that the COVID-19 virus has an animal source. However, the current spread of COVID-19 is a result of human to human transmission.
- However, as of 4 March, the Australian Veterinary Association have advised that Hong Kong’s Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department has identified a case of Covi-19 in a Pomeranian. It is believed that this is a case of human-to-animal (reverse zoonotic) transmission. At this stage there is no evidence that dogs can play a role in the spread of this human disease, or that they become sick.
- See World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) [FAQs](#) and [comprehensive guidance](#) on companion animal exposure.
- We will continue to speak with Animal Health Australia to understand more about potential livestock health impacts as more is known.

Food Safety

- The U.S. Food and Drug Administration and European Food Safety Authority has confirmed There is currently no evidence that food is a likely source or route of transmission of the virus and as such, there are no concerns as to the safety of seafood.
- The National Fisheries Institute in the United States have developed the Seafood Safety and Covid19 website which provides some helpful information, frequently asked questions (with great authoritative references from international food safety authorities) and key messages, all focused on seafood safety and Covid19.

Cleaning standards

Please find below some information on cleaning standards for Coronavirus provided by the Australian Government Department of Health in response to a member query on what is expected of retailers if there is a direction by a health department to close and clean a store (e.g. if a virus carrier was identified as attending a store, and the advice was to close the store).

- The length of time that SARS-COV-2 (which causes COVID-19) survives on inanimate surfaces will vary depending on many factors including the amount of body fluid associated the contamination plus the ambient temperature and humidity of the environment. In general, coronaviruses in droplets do not survive very long on dry surfaces when the droplet of mucus produced by coughing or sneezing dries out.
- Because people who sneeze and cough may be present throughout the opening times of the store, frequent cleaning, especially of surfaces and items frequently touched is important. Alcohol-based hand rub stations should be placed liberally around shopping aisles, especially in areas where food stuffs are on display and where frequent touching of produce occurs.
- Signs should be considered to ask shoppers to only touch what they intend to purchase. Training staff to encourage use of alcohol-based hand rub as well as coughing and sneezing etiquette should be instituted by company WHS advisors.
- The risk when cleaning is not the same as the risk when face to face with a sick person who may be coughing or sneezing.
- Cleaning staff should be informed to avoid touching their face, especially their mouth, nose, and eyes when cleaning. Cleaning staff should wear impermeable disposable gloves and a surgical mask plus eye protection while cleaning. Cleaners should use alcohol-based hand rub before and after wearing gloves. Alcohol-based hand rub should also be used after removing the surgical mask and eye protection. The reason for the surgical mask and eye protection, is because even though the virus will not usually become airborne from cleaning, the surgical mask and eye protection acts as a barrier when people inadvertently touch their face with contaminated hands and fingers whether gloved or not.
- Simple disinfectants with label claims noting action against viruses can kill the virus making it no longer possible to infect people.
- If there is visible body fluid contamination the cleaner should also wear a full-length disposable gown in addition to the surgical mask, eye protection, and gloves. Advice should be sought from your WHS consultants on correct procedures for wearing PPE.

RESOURCES AND ADVICE

World Health Organisation

- [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) advice for the public: When and how to use masks](#)
- [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) advice for the public](#)
- [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) advice for the public: Myth busters](#)
- [Q&As re Animal Health](#)

Australia Department of Health

- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) – what you need to know](#)
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) information on the use of surgical masks](#)
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) information for hotel guests](#)
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) information for casual contacts of a confirmed case](#)
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) isolation guidance](#)
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) information about home isolation when unwell \(suspected or confirmed cases\)](#)
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) information about returning to your community](#)
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) information for travellers arriving from mainland China or Iran](#)
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) information for people with a suspected case \(疑似病例患者须知\)](#)
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) information for schools and early childhood centres, students and parents](#)
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) information for employers](#)

US Centre for Disease Control (CDC)

- [Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\), February 2020](#), US Centre for Disease Control (CDC), includes:
 - Recommended strategies for employers to use now
 - Important Considerations for Creating an Infectious Disease Outbreak Response Plan
 - Planning considerations for employers
- [Travel: Frequently Asked Questions and Answers](#) (for individuals), CDC
- [CDC Videos](#)

Miscellaneous

- [COVID-19: guidance for employers and businesses](#), Gov.UK
- [8 Questions Employers Should Ask About Coronavirus](#), Harvard Business Review
- [Guide on Business Continuity Planning for 2019 novel coronavirus](#), Enterprise Singapore