

# From the wilderness to Wall Street

*To get from the pristine waters of Tasmania's Macquarie Harbour to the table of a New York restaurant, Petuna Ocean Trout makes one of the world's longest export journeys 17,400 kilometres. **Global Supermarket** travelled every kilometre with the fish US chefs are falling in love with. **Paul Mitchell reports.** Photography by Virginia Cummins*



**Y**ou know we live in a global village when, without being frozen, a high-end perishable product like ocean trout can travel from Tasmania, one of the southern most parts of the world, to New York in the northern hemisphere – and the fish are as fresh as the day they were harvested.

By travelling almost 18,000 kilometres in around four and a half days, a Petuna Ocean Trout shipment makes one of the longest export journeys in the world. From Macquarie Harbour in south west Tasmania it is trucked to Devonport in the state's north. Then it travels on the *Spirit of Tasmania* ferry to Melbourne for a flight to Los Angeles where some of the shipment is trucked to LA restaurants. The rest of the fish goes to other parts of the US, including New York, another 4,000 kilometres from LA.

It's obviously difficult for a supplier to break into LA and New York restaurant (and retail) markets, and even more difficult if you are, like Petuna, trying to take product from, literally, one end of the world to the other. Once the hard promotional work has been done and a product has made it onto the menu, it must be delivered to restaurants at its best when the restaurant needs it – no questions asked. The logistical process must be as smooth as a trout swimming through the ocean.

Tasmania's Petuna Group (see case study, *Global Supermarket*, Summer 2003), a more than 40-year-old company owned by Peter and Una Rockliff, has never been daunted by the logistics of shipping products from Tasmania. It has always exported its live catch and in 1991 it commenced its aquaculture arm. The company, however, didn't begin exporting its farmed product until 2001, preferring to wait until it had developed a fine quality fish to take into high-end markets. Petuna's commitment and expertise was rewarded when it won the Agriculture Award at the 2003 Tasmanian Export Awards.

Petuna is currently making a strong push into the US and its products were featured earlier this year on a special LA presentation of the Channel Nine (Australia) *Today* show. And one of its key products is Petuna Ocean Trout: a fish with a vivid, red colour and unique taste profile. Its originality makes it an increasingly sought after product amongst top US chefs.

By following a shipment from Tasmania to the US, *Global Supermarket* saw first-hand that every link in the export chain must be strong to ensure none of the benefits are lost to the consumer of growing ocean trout in one of the world's most pristine environments.

**01 WEDNESDAY, 4.34 PM, FISHING VESSEL, MACQUARIE HARBOUR, TASMANIA.**

Petuna Ocean Trout bound for Los Angeles and New York are harvested from an aquaculture pen in Tasmania's Macquarie Harbour. The fish were initially spawned at Petuna's hatchery in Cressy, Tasmania, where they received water from Great Lake. The

pristine conditions continued in Macquarie Harbour, a body of water that receives flow from two of the world's freshest sources, the Gordon and Franklin Rivers.

After the fish are harvested, they are trucked to Petuna's factory in Devonport, northern Tasmania.

**02 THURSDAY, 11.13 AM, PETUNA PROCESSING PLANT, DEVONPORT, TASMANIA.**

Petuna Ocean Trout are gutted and gilled at the company's Devonport factory. They are placed in boxes (chilled by wet ice) and leave the factory at 3.00 pm in order to catch the *Spirit of Tasmania* ferry at 6.00 pm for an overnight journey to Melbourne.

**03 FRIDAY, 12.00 PM, HELLMANN PERISHABLE LOGISTICS, MELBOURNE.**

The shipment arrives at Hellmann Perishable Logistics' base near Melbourne Airport. It was trucked from Port Melbourne after the *Spirit of Tasmania* docked there at 7.00 am. Hellmann Perishable Logistics is a division of Hellmann Worldwide Logistics and the company handles the entire perishable spectrum, whether frozen or chilled, travelling via sea or air freight. After Hellmann receives the Petuna Ocean Trout shipment the company has it for 22 hours. During that time Hellmann keeps the product chilled and customers can at any time log onto Hellmann's website and check the temperature in the cool rooms. The company also handles the weekly flight booking with Qantas, checks the documentation and negotiates with the airline if further space is required for a larger than normal shipment.

"We load the product, cut what's called an 'air label' – which is a containment note – then lodge the containment note with Qantas and send the shipment to the US," said Vic Haseloff, Hellmann's sales and marketing manager (Victoria).

Mr Haseloff said timing issues were not as critical with chilled products as with live. He said Petuna Ocean Trout was one of the easier products to export because the fish are packed in polystyrene and each carton has its own wet ice.

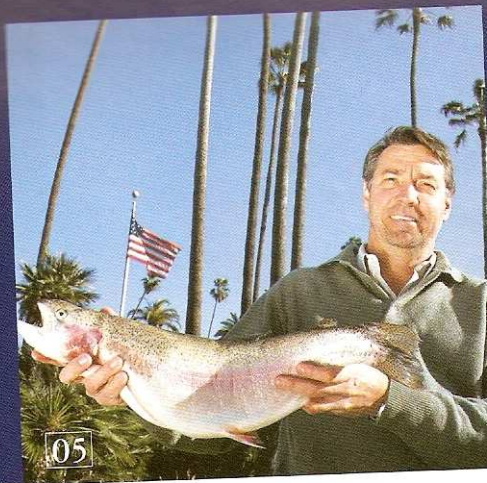
"It lasts longer than other products where you're just relying on a certain amount of dry ice per container for 50-60 cartons," Mr Haseloff said.

That said, however, it's obviously crucial that the ocean trout makes the Saturday flight to LA. After the shipment arrives, sections of it are transported to domestic locations while other sections head interstate – even as far as New York in the east.

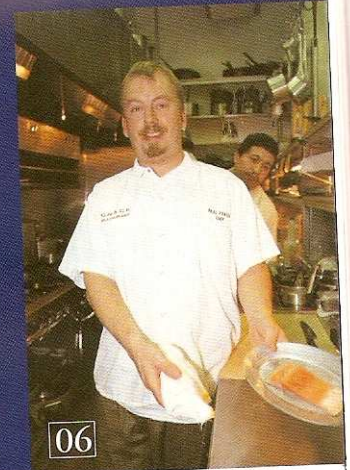
"It's still time sensitive," Mr Haseloff said. "They require it in LA to clear, deliver and on-forward to the east coast or into the local market. If the shipment is delayed it is a problem. But the problem is not so much with the quality of the product when it gets to the



04



05



06

other end. It is more that if it is delayed, the logistics of getting it to where it has to go in the US are impeded."

**04 SATURDAY, 9.02 AM, MELBOURNE AIRPORT.**

Petuna Ocean Trout is loaded onto a Qantas Boeing 747-400 for its 10.00 am flight to Los Angeles. Nicky Hionis from Qantas Freight Marketing said the fresh chilled and frozen seafood markets were rapidly growing ones for the airline. She added that the export of live seafood in tanks with supplied oxygen was an area of rapid growth.

"The seafood market has increased significantly over the last 10 years as better technology has ensured the quality of the Australian product," Ms Hionis said. "The SARS outbreak in Asia resulted in a large decline in people 'eating out' at restaurants and therefore the demand for fresh seafood fell dramatically. However, the recovery back to pre-SARS levels is underway and we hope to see continuing growth."

Ms Hionis said key products shipped were lobsters, crabs, whole tuna, salmon, prawns and other shellfish, going to markets like Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan and China. She added that products like oranges, apples and broccoli were now travelling sea freight because of technology which allowed 'freezing' of fruit and vegetables' ripening processes.

"Conversely there are types of perishable products that remain part of the 'just in time' concept, such as mangoes, strawberries, blueberries, etc. that need to be delivered to their destination within 24 hours of packing. Only airfreight will provide the means to achieve this."

Ms Hionis said exporters had increased their focus on product integrity in the past five years and added that airlines had contributed through the development of insulated containers exclusively designed for transporting perishables. She said the perishable market had always been a significant section of Qantas air freight and that in regard to new markets China loomed on the horizon.

"The growth of China's economy and potential huge demand for quality food as personal income grows is seen as the most exciting market for Qantas during the next few years. The growing demand for live product is also seen as a growth area of the perishable market." Space availability is one of the key issues in today's air freight environment, especially for companies who export to the US (only Qantas and United Airlines are currently freighting to the US).

Ms Hionis said space availability was especially an issue during peak times like Chinese New Year.

"Qantas has always operated supplementary flights to cope with excess passenger and freight demand during these periods," she said. "This strategy, combined with the purchase of additional aircraft to operate on key routes, and the increased availability of freighter

operations into growing markets will ensure that capacity is available when needed."

**05 SATURDAY 10.05 AM, LEE FISH USA, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA.**

Crossing a time zone, the Petuna Ocean Trout shipment arrives in Los Angeles at 7.00 am Saturday. It is unloaded, clears customs and is trucked to Lee Fish USA (see Case Study on page 40) arriving at 10.00 am. The shipment is then unpacked and, still in wet ice, is broken down according to client orders and by 12.00 pm is placed in Lee Fish USA's chiller.

The orders are then trucked and flown to destinations throughout the US, including the rest of California, Illinois, Florida, Georgia and Massachusetts. Lee Fish USA also at 4.00 pm loads a section of the shipment onto containers and tenders it to LAX Airport for a 10.00 pm flight to New York. Some of the shipment remains in Los Angeles and is trucked that afternoon to high profile restaurants.

**06 SATURDAY, 2.17 PM, GRACE RESTAURANT, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA.**

At Grace (see Case Study on page 38) chef Neal Fraser sautes the fish and serves it with forbidden black rice, vichy carrots, red cabbage and a celery root veloute. Mr Fraser said when Lee Fish USA first brought him a sample of Petuna Ocean Trout he was hooked by both the fish's bright red colouring and unique flavour profile.

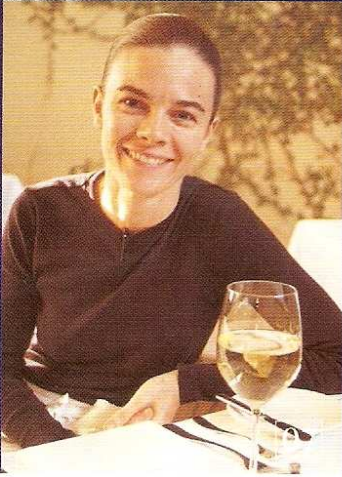
Petuna Ocean Trout is renamed 'Tasmanian Steelhead Salmon'. Mr Fraser said this was in order to both attract customers who enjoy the taste of salmon and to differentiate the product from other farm-raised salmon suffering from disease problems.

**07 SATURDAY, 2.21 PM, LUCQUES RESTAURANT, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA.**

Petuna Ocean Trout arrives at Lucques Restaurant (see Case Study on page 34) where it appears on award-winning chef Suzanne Goin's menu as grilled pancetta-wrapped trout with sorrel, fennel gratin, verjus and crushed grapes. Ms Goin said when she first came across Petuna Ocean Trout she was at the time looking for a unique, sustainably raised fish. "I wanted a product that couldn't be found on just any menu," Ms Goin said.

**SATURDAY, 3.09 PM, WHOLEFOODS SUPERMARKET, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA.**

In addition to the restaurants, Petuna Ocean Trout is also trucked to 19 west coast outlets of the Wholefoods Supermarket chain. Wholefoods was established in Texas in 1980 and, with 156 outlets in North America and the UK, is the world's biggest retailer



of natural and organic foods.

Wholefoods adheres to strict product standards that cover sustainability, food safety and environmental issues. The company is highly selective about what it sells, and is committed to sustainable agriculture. Wholefoods is driven by a belief in the symbiotic relationship between the environment, the food chain and people, and aims to provide food to customers in the purest state possible. The company also supports food banks, sponsors local events, compensates its staff for community service work, and contributes at least five percent of total net profits to not-for-profit organisations.

Tim Hess, the Petuna Group's manager of sales and logistics, said the supermarket is comprehensive in its assessment of potential suppliers.

"It was done by Lee Fish USA and Superior Seafood [the company that supplies seafood to Wholefoods]. Wholefoods was big on where we grow the fish, the density per pen and whether the growing area was close to any urban developments," Mr Hess said. "The fact that we're in a world heritage area where there are virtually no buildings or houses was important."

Mr Hess added that Wholefoods ensured there were no steroids or antibiotics used on their fish and were attentive to the feed composition served to the ocean trout.

"The whole process took around six months; they're very thorough," Mr Hess said.

Despite the lengthy and detailed process, Mr Hess said it was worth it to be a supplier to such a high-end supermarket.

"There's one chain selling Atlantic Salmon at US\$2.00 per pound and our sell price for Petuna Ocean Trout is \$US6.00 before it gets into the system," he said, adding that the product retails at Wholefoods for US\$17.50 per pound.

Mr Hess said patience was important in dealing with Wholefoods' stringent processes and that it was important to have a quality product to begin with. These days Wholefoods is constantly demanding more product from Petuna.

"You've got to make sure you stick close to what Wholefoods' total market is and understand what they're trying to achieve as a company."

**08 SUNDAY 11.58 PM, PIERLESS FISH CORP., BROOKLYN, NEW YORK.**

After crossing another two time zones, the Petuna Ocean Trout shipment is unpacked at the Brooklyn headquarters of import company, Pierless Fish Corp. Previous to this the New York shipment arrived at JFK airport at 6.00 am and was couriered to Pierless Fish Corp.

Traditionally, Manhattan's Fulton Street Fish market bought most of the seafood that entered New York and then sold it to buyers for a 'return'. Nowadays things are different, with companies like Robert DeMasco's Pierless Fish Corp. communicating with suppliers

and receiving products almost directly.

"Do we cut out the middle man? Not 100 percent," Mr DeMasco said. "But we know what we're getting, we can control quality and get better pricing that way."

Mr DeMasco said that in recent times his sales of seafood from the South Pacific had grown exponentially.

"With the Tasmanian trout I was selling about 100 pounds [about 45 kgs] a week about 14 months ago, now I'm up to about 800 pounds [about 360 kgs] a week. I consider it an idiot-proof product because they [Petuna] do such a great job, we can't screw it up either. I can say, 'Try the trout: it's phenomenal, you'll be happy with it' and I know exactly what customers are getting. Every day it is the same, very, very consistent."

Mr DeMasco says he receives tremendous feedback from customers about Petuna Ocean Trout and that chefs from Las Vegas to Vermont and Atlanta are putting the fish on the menu.

"We force it on them in the beginning, but once they get it . . ."

In addition, New Zealand snapper is increasingly popular and Australian swordfish is in great demand.

"More Australian product is coming through in the last few years and the best swordfish comes out of Australia," Mr DeMasco said. "People ask for it, have you got Australian swordfish for me? If you've got great quality stuff it's easy to sell, it makes my job easier, it gets to the point where it sells itself."

Mr DeMasco said the name "Australia" had to an extent in the US become a brand for seafood. But he added this also had a downside in the market.

"People might not really have it, but they know it is such a great brand name that they add it to it: Oh, I've got Australian swordfish and they don't. But it has made a branding for itself and that's great."

**09 SUNDAY 11.14 AM, AMUSE RESTAURANT, MANHATTAN, NEW YORK.**

Petuna Ocean Trout arrives at chef Gerry Hayden's restaurant, Amuse (see Case Study on page 46). Mr Hayden said he saw the fish in Australian cook books and was very interested in it. Robert DeMasco from Pierless Fish Corp. brought the fish into the restaurant and Mr Hayden said he liked the product's "richness".

"It's got a much nicer flavour than char, I believe. Beautiful colour. The oily, fatty content is great for sauteing and just gives it a really nice, rich flavour," he said. "I put it on the menu immediately because it was such a good fish. It's different, you don't see a Tasmanian sea trout on a lot of menus. You see salmon, cod, skate . . . I get quite a lot of people asking me about it; it's unusual. People ask, a) where's Tasmania? b) is it a trout, or is it a salmon? So there's quite a lot to talk about with customers." ○