

MEDIA RELEASE

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\$26 MILLION INVESTMENT RECOGNISES GROUND-BREAKING RESEARCH

Cawthron Institute's ground-breaking research to domesticate the New Zealand Greenshell™ mussel now has a vehicle to take it to market thanks to a new \$26 million agreement announced yesterday, the Cawthron Institute says.

The Ministry for Primary Industries and SPATnz have signed a seven year innovation contract to selectively breed mussel spat at the Cawthron Aquaculture Park north of Nelson, using research established by Cawthron's MBIE-funded Cultured Shellfish Programme. The announcement was made during Prime Minister John Key's official visit to Cawthron in Nelson yesterday.

"It's fantastic that research into product enhancement for Greenshell™ mussels will now be able to be used to benefit the New Zealand mussel industry and help it take off internationally," Cawthron Chief Executive Professor Charles Eason says. "It's possibly the most exciting thing to happen in the mussel industry for decades – it will propel it forward."

The new contract will see \$13 million each of public and industry funding invested in the project. It has been hailed as the most significant research, development and commercialisation investment made in New Zealand's Greenshell™ mussel industry since the first marine farms were established in the 1970s.

Professor Eason says the initiative is an excellent example of how industry and science can work together to add value to New Zealand's existing food export products.

"Mussels are a comparatively low value, high volume product and our goal through scientific advancements and industry collaboration has been to turn it into a high value product," Professor Eason says. "New Zealand's strength is in food production and it's essential, if we want to continue to stand out from the rest of the world, that we maintain a close tie between our commercial sectors and the production-focused research that Cawthron is so good at."

Currently all mussel seed is collected from the wild, making it difficult to guarantee supply and quality. Cawthron's research will enable the mussels to be grown from hatchery seed that have been specifically selected for desirable characteristics such as health promoting benefits, rather than from wild spat.

“Currently the mussel seed is only available a few times of the year which makes for an erratic supply if things go wrong,” Cawthron’s Cultured Shellfish Programme leader and Senior Scientist Nick King says.

“Hatchery spat on the other hand can be produced on demand, is of consistent quality and can be produced using selectively bred broodstock, which will provide the mussel industry with the benefits enjoyed by almost every other primary producer.”

Around 70 percent of New Zealand’s mussel production is based in the Top of the South. Mussel exports are worth \$220 million annually to the New Zealand economy.

“The breeding and husbandry initiatives we’ve developed here at Cawthron really give the aquaculture sector a chance to step up and play a much more significant role in the food export industry,” Professor Eason says.

Cawthron Institute is New Zealand’s largest independent research institute specialising in freshwater and coastal marine, environmental research and research for the food and aquaculture industries. It also has substantial testing laboratories and provides seafood safety testing for key sectors of the aquaculture industry.

The SPATnz mussel selective breeding programme will see a new shellfish hatchery built at the Cawthron Aquaculture Park. Construction will begin in 2013, with a hatchery building, nursery building and three ponds of approximately 1500sqm each being built on site. The first significant quantities of commercially bred mussels are planned for 2015.

During his visit yesterday, the Prime Minister also unveiled a sign and viewed plans for Cawthron’s new \$5 million high-technology laboratories ahead of construction starting in January. He met with key researchers and gave a speech to staff, management and directors around the significance of high-value scientific research and development to the economy, aquaculture in particular, and the positive contribution Cawthron is making in the area.

ENDS

Image details: The Rt Hon John Key, Prime Minister, at Cawthron Institute in Nelson yesterday to view plans for the new \$5 million high-technology laboratories, looks at the science behind the organisation.

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