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SEAFOOD

AUSTRALIA

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**'Brolos' Brand
Rock Lobsters from WA**

Ricciardi Seafoods Achieves Shore Success *with Continuous Steam Cooking*

Recently, Ricciardi Seafoods achieved major improvements in yield, product quality and labor efficiency. What's their secret?

FROM SHIP TO SHORE

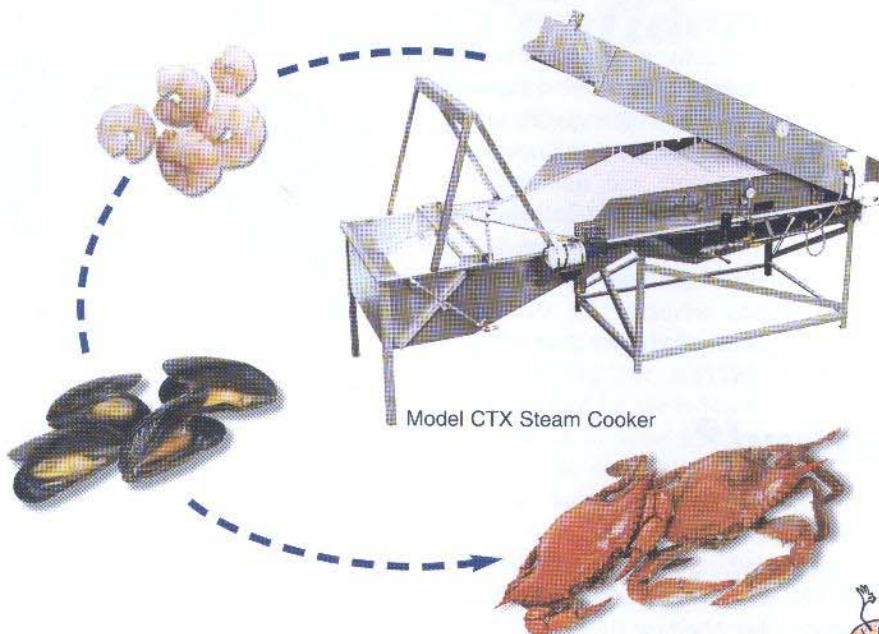
Ricciardi Seafoods has maintained a substantial position in the Australian seafood processing industry for over 40 years. Based in Fremantle, the family-owned fishing and processing company mainly exports king and tiger prawns to worldwide markets, including Japan and Europe. Suddenly, within two fishing seasons, the company improved their yield by 3% and revolutionized their operations. The seafood processing industry would be well-advised to discover why - and how - they made the leap.

Given the company's longevity, one might conclude that Ricciardi is a stickler for tried and true methods. But company spokesman Brett Hogan says Ricciardi's solid reputation stems from their commitment to "provide consistent and improved quality through innovation and technol-



Ricciardi's 'tightly controlled constant flow production' begins when raw prawns enter the Model CTX Steam Cooker's infeed tank

Laitram Machinery's Pure Steam Cooking Technology



Model CTX Steam Cooker

- Laitram's Pure Steam Technology provides seafood processors with higher product yield, superior product quality, longer product shelf life, and lower energy and effluent costs.
- Laitram Machinery manufactures a complete line of stainless steel equipment for cooking and chilling crab, lobster, shrimp, crawfish and other commercial seafood species.

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ogy." That progressive motto prompted Ricciardi to supercharge their processing operations two seasons ago. Their target: the inefficient batch water cooking conducted aboard the company's trawlers in Shark Bay.

Ricciardi's vessels stay out to sea for a month at a time, and about 30% of their prawn catch was cooked onboard, then frozen. However, turbulent conditions at sea could restrict cooking opportunities to periods of calm weather. So in 1996, Ricciardi built a new shore factory in Fremantle and planned to move a portion of its cooking operations there. But the real catalyst for Ricciardi's progress involved a fresh look at seafood cooking technology.

FULL STEAM AHEAD

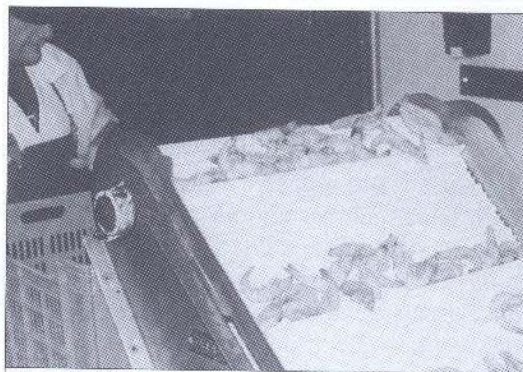
The decision to invest in new technology can be tough, but Ricciardi knew what they wanted: a safer, more efficient cooking method plus good post-sale support for the equipment purchased. Ricciardi carefully considered several candidates before choosing the Model CTX Steam Cooker from Laitram Machinery, a veteran seafood processing equipment company based in the USA. "Laitram's strong international profile was what first attracted us to their system," Hogan recalled. "They're a global company that can back up their systems and understand foreign requirements in a professional way." The Model CTX also seemed more advanced than its competitors, so Laitram's attentive service simply clinched the deal.

And a good deal it was. Ricciardi originally planned to cook only their cheaper product on shore since it would have to undergo freezing before and after cooking,

presumably reducing quality.

However, Hogan noted, the Model CTX Steam Cooker maintained such high quality in the cooked product that Ricciardi immediately delegated all cooking operations to the Fremantle factory.

"Our overall yield increased 2-3% and there was a marked textural improvement in the prawn. The steam cooker allows us to cook to order and control cook times with complete accuracy. The non-pressurized in-line system has allowed us to move away from batch processing into



Steam-cooked prawns retain texture and colour as they leave the chiller to be packaged

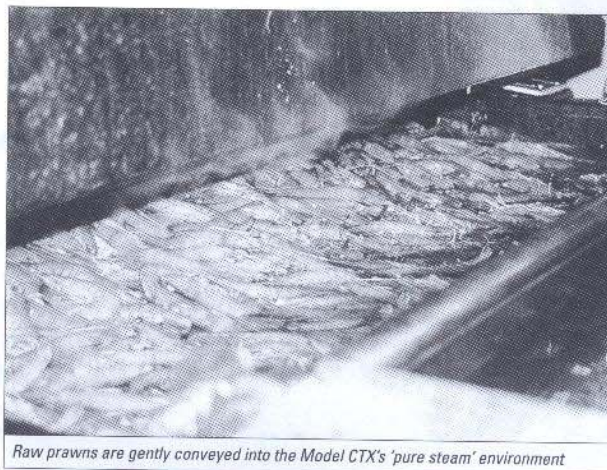
tightly controlled constant flow production."

This fundamental change in operations improved manpower ratios in the shore plant as well, allowing Ricciardi to tailor the number of workers needed while achieving more consistent throughput.

THE SCOOP ON THE MODEL CTX

The Model CTX Steam Cooker's power lies in its unique combination of features and innovative technology.

Prawns (or other shellfish) are conveyed through a "pure steam" cooking environment of 100°C. The cooker's automatic thermostatic control valve senses and adjust to the thermal load, so only the steam used in the cooking process is replaced. This feature ensures steam penetration through the entire product bed.



Raw prawns are gently conveyed into the Model CTX's 'pure steam' environment

The regulated steam flow is also automatically and precisely matched to the amount of product being processed, resulting in energy savings of more than 50% in most cases.

For peeled prawns, the Model CTX offers an additional benefit: Laitram's patented Individual Quick Blanch (IQB) device allows peeled product to gently tumble in the cooking chamber, ensuring an even, consistent blanch. (For other applications, the repositioning devices can be removed.)

"The (IQB's) integrated infeed and multiple flip options were useful features," Hogan affirmed, adding that Ricciardi considered the cooker to be thoroughly engineered.

"We found the CTX Steam Cooker to be very easy to use, with only minor maintenance requirements."

Currently, Ricciardi ranks as a top-five Australian exporter of king prawns, and their cooked product consists mostly of head-on, 10 to 30 count/lb. prawns. Now their steaming success has inspired them to test other shellfish applications on the Model CTX Steam Cooker, with promising results.

"We have experimented with blue mussel and blue swimmer crab, and have found good yield improvements in each," Hogan reported. The company has conducted equally successful trials with rock lobsters, and will extend the trials to include yabbies next.

Truly living by their philosophy of improvement through technology, Ricciardi might also have drawn inspiration from Albert Einstein's observation, "In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity."

With one carefully considered equipment purchase, Ricciardi expanded not only their yield, but their prospects as well. This seasoned company is definitely one to watch in the new millennium.



Ricciardi's Fremantle factory workers package whole steam-cooked prawns for world-wide export