The Northern Territory today takes a step closer to having a trepang (sea cucumber) culture industry with the opening of a pilot hatchery for trepang at the Darwin Aquaculture Centre on Channel Island.

Fisheries Minister, Kon Vatskalis, said the hatchery has been designed and built by local trepang harvester, Tasmanian Seafoods, and is the result of a cooperative arrangement between the Northern Territory Government and the company.

“This is a perfect example of what can be achieved when Government and industry work closely together to keep the Territory moving ahead,” said Mr Vatskalis.

“The sub leasing of land at the Darwin Aquaculture Centre has allowed Tasmanian Seafoods to fast track its research and development project, and also gives the company access to equipment and technical expertise at the Centre. This is a win-win situation for all involved.”

Mr Vatskalis said the trade in trepang was the Territory’s first export industry which commenced when the Maccassans visited our shores in the 1600s. At that time it is believed over 2000 tonnes of trepang were harvested each year.

Today the precautionary harvest trigger point has been calculated at 640 tonnes per year and the aim of the pilot hatchery is to investigate the potential of ‘ranching’ sea cucumbers to increase production.

“The NT Wild capture Trepang Fishery was recently assessed by the Commonwealth Department of Environment and Heritage and received a Wildlife Trade Operations accreditation,” said Mr Vatskalis.

“This clearly demonstrates that the fishery is well managed and the new hatchery will strive to assist the future growth and sustainability of the wild capture fishery.”

Trepang is a sought after and valuable commodity in Asia, particularly China, where the dried product is used in a variety of dishes and is believed to have medicinal properties.

If the pilot project is successful there are plans to construct a large commercial production facility on land adjacent to the Darwin Aquaculture Centre. This would result in increased employment opportunities across the Northern Territory and a boost to Territory exports.

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