

## NETHERLANDS

### First farm for barramundi

BARRAMUNDI has a reputation as one of Australia's finest eating fish, and is increasingly being served in European restaurants. It has a firm, white, fine-grained flesh, is mild in flavour, provides good fillets, and can be cooked in a number of different ways. It is also highly priced.

However, as an estuarine fish, its qualities can be variable, especially if the estuary is turbid or muddy, so attention is being turned to aquaculture.

According to Harrie Rutgers, general manager of Cell Aquaculture Systems Europe, who has just set up the first barramundi farm in the Netherlands, the fish is not a threatened species in the wild, but its market value makes it highly suited to rearing in captivity.

'The world needs more farmed fish to close the 50 million tonne anticipated gap between the wild supply and demand in 2010, and our company is developing new systems to make this possible for a number of species, including Australian Murray cod (*Maccullochella peelii peellii*), golden perch (*Macquaria ambigua*) and Swan River prawns (*Metapenaeus dalli*),' he states.

Cell Aquaculture is the Australian developer of the Eco-Cell system, which it claims is a breakthrough in aquaculture technology that makes it completely environmentally friendly. The system comprises a climatically controlled, insulated building which houses a number of 70-tonne capacity sub-cell units consisting of two tanks and a three stage filtration and water recycling system. Waste is discharged into sealed containers where it is



Harris Rutgers with barramundi which are now being farmed in the Netherlands.

solidified for use as a high-grade fertiliser.

The company supplies everything from fingerlings flown in from Australia to stock the farm on a continuous basis, to technology, equipment and know-how. A planned brood unit and hatchery is intended to supply fingerlings to other potential operators in Europe where Cell Aquaculture has joint venture facilities starting out.

It also has business in the USA and Asia, and is seeking further partners and licensees to expand and develop the concept.

'Some of the benefits of this system are that it can be used for fresh or salt water species, is economical to run, and can be housed close to the market, allowing local consumers to enjoy really fresh fish,' says Mr Rutgers.

The first batch of fingerlings arrived in the Netherlands at the end of 2005 and is expected to be on the market in mid-2006. 'This is a fast growing fish and production times range from six months to reach a plate size of 500g, to nine months for a 750g fish, which is big enough to provide fillets,' he explains.

'Trials have shown that the yield of a 1kg fish is 60%, which is highly acceptable to restaurateurs and fishmongers,' he adds.

As with farmed Dover sole, market testing remains to be done, although the fish has been well received in local restaurants, including the local Michelin starred Restaurant Koriander in Drachten. However, the company's research shows that there is space on the market for around 600 tonnes of fish, which would be sold at €11 (\$13.3) per kg at current pricing.