

WORLD AQUACULTURE CONFERENCE - CASE STUDY

SNAPSHOT FACTS:

Conference Name:	2023 World Aquaculture Conference (WA2023)
Dates:	29 May – 1 June 2023
Host organisation:	World Aquaculture Society
Number of delegates:	1394 participants (809 international delegates from 75 countries; 585 delegates from Australia)
NT location:	Darwin, Northern Territory, Australia
Conference venue:	Darwin Convention Centre

Event Overview:

The *World Aquaculture Society* was founded in 1969 and its membership has grown to more than 3,000 members in approximately 100 countries, representing the global aquaculture community.

The *World Aquaculture Conference (WA2023)* staged in Darwin combined the *Annual International Conference & Exposition of World Aquaculture Society*, *Asian Pacific Aquaculture 2023* and also the annual meeting of the *Asian Pacific Chapter of the World Aquaculture Society*. The conference also incorporated a major international trade show with over 80 exhibitors showcasing the latest aquaculture technologies from around the world.

WA2023 attracted 1394 attendees including leading national and global aquaculture industry sector experts. Many came from the Asia Pacific region and more than 75 countries from throughout the world were represented at the conference. They included industry representatives, researchers, analysts, academics, government officials, policymakers and over eighty students.

The annual conference provides a forum for the industry to present their work, exchange ideas and develop a vision for the future of the aquaculture industry. In 2023, the conference theme was “Supporting Strength in Aquaculture” which not only looked at the latest in technical developments but also brought into focus the wellbeing of people involved in aquaculture.

Why Darwin and Australia’s Northern Territory (NT) as the host location?

Darwin and the NT were considered ideal for WA2023, due to the region’s close proximity to not only an expanding and vibrant Australian industry but also Asia, which represents nearly 89% of the world’s aquaculture production. Attracting the conference to Darwin was a joint partnership between *Northern Territory Business Events* and the *Darwin Convention Centre*. The bid was also supported by *Tourism Australia* through its *Business Events Bid Fund Program*.

The expansion of the aquaculture industry is one of the Northern Territory Government’s key economic objectives - this includes the transformation of the *Darwin Aquaculture Centre* into a centre of excellence in aquaculture research and development.

The Program:

A number of workshops, seminars and technical tours were conducted on the day of registration and exhibitor bump-in. A two-day *International Tropical Rock Oyster Workshop* held prior to the start of the conference was hosted by *NT Fisheries* and *The Pacific Community* and supported by the *Cooperative Research Centre for Developing Northern Australia*. It brought together a broad range of stakeholders to share experiences and develop an international network for tropical oyster aquaculture research and development.

The WA2023 conference comprised plenary and multiple break-out sessions, workshops, a debate and a trade show of 80 exhibition booths. The Darwin Convention Centre's Auditorium, Waterfront Rooms and Meeting Rooms accommodated the multi-stream gatherings whilst the Centre's Exhibition Halls housed the trade show.

The 34 sessions staged at the conference included topics addressing global sustainability, diversity and inclusivity in the aquaculture industry. Discussions also focussed on regenerative aquaculture, sustainable aquafeed development, protecting the health and biosecurity of aquatic animals, Indigenous aquaculture, and supporting the mental health of people working in aquaculture.

A workshop titled "Breaking the Barriers" highlighted topics around inclusivity and was open to women and men from all sectors of the aquaculture industry. It enabled valuable discussion on shared critical issues which impact women in the aquaculture sector.

Speakers at WA2023 included one of the Northern Territory's aquaculture specialists, Dan Richards, CEO of *Humpty Doo Barramundi*, which is an award-winning, family-owned barramundi farm operating in the Northern Territory. The company is widely recognised for its work pioneering barramundi farming and is now the largest of its kind in Australia.

Offsite technical touring:

Several off-site technical tours were available for delegates to visit NT aquaculture research and development operations. One of these was a half-day visit to the *Darwin Aquaculture Centre*, located approximately 50 kilometres from the city. This facility offers education and knowledge from industry professionals engaged in researching blacklip rock oysters, black jewfish and barramundi aquaculture.

Another half-day excursion took delegates to *Barramundi Adventures Darwin*, a land-based barramundi fishing farm located at the southern end of Darwin Harbour. The facility combines unique tourism activities with aquaculture. Australia's CSIRO, the Australian Government agency responsible for scientific research, collaborates with the farm on research into low-density tiger prawn farming.

Social Programme:

The Opening Ceremony and Welcome function were hosted on the alfresco Frangipani Plaza of the Darwin Convention Centre. The President's Reception was held on the Centre's porte-cochere where street food stations provided a diverse range of dining options.

Happy Hour and Poster sessions were staged in the Exhibition Halls and the conference farewell drinks were held in the Exhibition Halls and Convention Centre Concourse area.

About the Darwin Convention Centre:

Organisers advised that the *Darwin Convention Centre* was the perfect convention centre with a location close to many restaurants and hotels and everything within walking distance.

They indicated the centre was ideal for the WAS events, with its large plenary venue, smaller conference rooms plus halls for the exhibition. They added that the Centre's food and beverage and service in general throughout the event was excellent.

Community engagement & sustainability:

A 'side event' held during the conference was hosted by *Inspired NT*, the Northern Territory division of *Inspiring Australia*, a national strategy for engagement with the sciences. "Aquafutura" was staged at *Bustard Town*, a Darwin restaurant specialising in fire-cooking and tapas. The event was attended by approximately 30-40 people, including a number of locals from *Charles Darwin University* as well as young researcher conference attendees. Several conference speakers presented talks and initiated discussion on the circular food system, aquaculture and issues around ocean plastics.

How did Northern Territory Business Events and the Darwin Convention Centre assist with the conference journey?

Organisers from the World Aquaculture Society visited Darwin in June 2018 for a site inspection of the city to assess its capacity and capability as a future conference destination. This visit was jointly hosted by *NT Business Events* and the *Darwin Convention Centre*.

A joint bid was subsequently submitted on behalf of Darwin and the Northern Territory which highlighted the significant support on offer from *Business Events Australia* and also *NT Business Events*, on behalf of the NT Government's Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade. During the bid process, *NT Business Events* liaised closely with a range of national aquaculture and seafood organisations to support the bid, with the Australian Seafood Industry Association ultimately taking a place on the conference steering committee.

Delegate boosting promotion was undertaken by *Darwin Convention Centre* and *NT Business Events* at the World Aquaculture Conference held in Singapore in 2022. This not only served to grow interest in the Darwin conference but also enabled prospective delegates to learn more about Australia's Northern Territory and the opportunities on offer to explore the destination via pre or post conference touring.

Pre and post touring:

A significant number of delegates arrived on the weekend prior to the conference in order to experience Darwin and surrounds, with many also staying on through to the following week in order to visit iconic NT locations such as UNESCO World-Heritage listed Kakadu National Park, Litchfield National Park and spectacular Nitmiluk Gorge.

In their words:

Organisers advised that Darwin was the ideal destination for both business and pleasure and that “seeing nothing but smiling faces amongst participants” was a clear indication of delegate satisfaction.

Very positive feed-back was received across the range of attendees – some examples included:

“I had the privilege of attending World Aquaculture 2023 in Darwin, Australia. The conference brought together experts and enthusiasts from around the world, fostering knowledge exchange and collaboration in the field of aquaculture. Darwin, with its stunning natural beauty and unique wildlife and warm hospitality, provided the perfect backdrop for this event. My delegate experience was exceptional, with insightful sessions, engaging discussions, and networking opportunities that were truly enriching.”

Melody Vanukon
Marine Scientist MSc., Vanuatu Fisheries Department

"Great start to the week at the World Aquaculture Conference being held in sunny #Darwin #WAS2023. Kicked off by a fantastic opening and plenary delivered by Dan Richards from Humpty Doo Barramundi - a fantastic insight into a 30-year-old pioneering aquaculture business, producing one of the most iconic brands on the market."

Katherine Campbell
Chief Commercial Officer, Source Certain



The WA2023 Conference trade show attracted 80 exhibitors