

The sea is a common property resource.

Seafood is enjoyed by 96% of Australians, 80% of whom buy it and 16% of whom catch all or most of what they eat.

Australia supplies just 60% by volume of the seafood consumed in this country. With the health benefits of seafood consumption becoming increasingly obvious, consumption is rising, but wild harvest production is at or close to optimum levels and cultured production is increasing only slowly. The widening gap must be filled by imported seafood.

With this in mind there has been a concerted national, State and enterprise effort to ensure that the supply of seafood is maintained. This has been effected by co-operative research between government agencies, universities, industry and community is the driver of an industry lead CRC for Seafood.

Nationally, investment in R & D to ensure the supply has been driven by the Fisheries R& D Corporation. It's areas of research has been in natural resources – the public good component that secures supply, industry development, the component that lifts supply through cultured production and spreads human consumption to new products and lesser known species and human capital development to ensure that there are people to continue in the industry at all levels, research, management, supply and through the chain to the community.

Publicly funded R & D has never lost sight of the fact that, without a consumer, there would be no harvest. Publicly funded R & D has also been a relatively small proportion of overall R & D and its cost, even when conducted by government, is frequently fully funded by industry.

There is no line between public and private good in Seafood R&D. There is, of course, private R & D for the benefit of individual enterprises but that transforms to better products for consumers either in Australia or overseas. Public funds that benefit private industry translate either into better local supply or an improved balance of payments. Investment in Australian sources of production also translates into a slowing of the increase in imported product and greater value-adding of imported raw materials in Australia.

In conclusion, the benefit and publicly funded fisheries R & D is felt by the owners of this common property resource. The hypothesis that there is a division between public and private good, which is distinct and measurable, does not hold for fisheries research. All research and development benefits the Australian consumer and it is the consumer who will be worst affected by any reduction in the levels of government commitment to R & D.