

From Prize fighting to Fish Wrangling

In 2014 Japan-native Kazuto 'Kaz' Senga, found himself at a bit of a loose end. Injury had cut short a promising professional fighting career and he was back in Japan working casual shifts on commercial fishing boats.

Kaz, now 38, had grown up in the Caribbean where his Dad had worked helping Government's establish sustainable fishing programmes. A promising athlete, the young Senga won a wrestling scholarship to the University of Arizona and there got caught up in the fighting scene and turned professional. He fought in Thailand and across Europe but in 2010 injury forced him out. He found work at a gym in Sweden training others but when that dried up he wound up back in Japan.

'I didn't really know what I wanted to do'. It was very difficult to get into the Japanese fishing industry. 'It was then I discovered aquaculture'. He knew he wanted to study offshore so he started applying to degree programmes at universities around the world. He got a welcoming response from Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology's aquaculture staff and he was also keen 'to see what goes on in New Zealand'.

In 2016 Kaz graduated with eight others from NMIT's two-year diploma aquaculture programme. From there he spent three years working on New Zealand King Salmon's marine farms where, he says, what he had learned on the NMIT course made a big difference to how he approached his work.

'At the start a lot of guys didn't think much of the knowledge that I'd gained on the course, they dismissed it. But things changed. There were a few issues particularly with aspects of feeding and environment, and people were starting to appreciate an aquaculture education.

'I also found that I was pro-active, had a good work ethic and took responsibility on the job', he says.

While he was initially committed to finfish farming, Kaz is keen to build a career in the industry. He recently switched to mussel harvesting and is now working for Wakatū Incorporation's food offshoot Kono. And this year he is planning to enrol in the NMIT Maritime School's Skipper Restricted Limits programme with the hope of becoming a marine farm boat skipper in the future.

As an international student Kaz studied full time toward NMIT'S aquaculture diploma. Traditionally full-time study was the main route for those keen to develop in the industry. However, this year NMIT introduced a new part-time Certificate in Sustainable Aquaculture programme where students can enrol on a blended learning programme and fit this in around full-time work. The Certificate programmes are also free to the student as the Government is picking up the fees under the Targeted Training and Apprenticeship Fund (TTAF). The part-time programme is taught through online materials, recorded and live online sessions and an on-campus block course later in the year. Students can also enrol during the year with intakes to the hatchery, husbandry, and industry experience courses available in May, July, and September respectively (see **Aquaculture enrolments jump with new programme**).



Caption: Former professional fighter turned aquaculture farmer, Kazuto Senga, examines the latest crop of salmon in the NMIT wet lab.

Aquaculture enrolments jump with new programme.

NMIT's brand new aquaculture certificate is proving a big hit with students. From a standing start the level 3 programme has enrolled 34 new students this year with a third taking up the chance to study a blended course with online and practical blocks courses.

'We are thrilled with the enrolments so far', says Programme Lead Specialist Craig Prichard, 'and we are particularly keen to grow enrolments through the year among aquaculture industry staff'.

He said the beauty of the programme for those already in the industry is they can join course intakes in May, July and September and complete the four courses programme in a year of blended online learning and short block courses. The aim is that people can fit this in around full-time work commitments, he said. The Level 3 and 4 offerings are also free to the students as the Government is picking up the tab under the Targeted Training and Apprenticeship Fund (TTAF).

Meanwhile this year's 23 full-time students will complete the four-course certificate programme in one semester and move onto the level four certificate later in the year.

The new level 3 and level 4 certificate programmes, which replace the former aquaculture diploma, are designed to give students a solid grounding in fish and shellfish biology, plus farming and conservation practices. The courses also cover some of the emerging aquaculture sectors such as seaweed. Once completed some students could potentially go on to study fulltime toward NMIT's aquaculture degree and postgraduate qualifications.