



# MSA's BIG MILESTONE



## Pineapple's 600,000 hits

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**E**LEVEN years and more than 600,000 steaks after it all started, Brisbane's Pineapple Hotel steakhouse continues to back the Meat Standards Australia tenderness guarantee program to the hilt.

As one of the original handful of food service outlets licensed during the 1998 Brisbane MSA pilot project, the Pineapple can claim to have the nation's longest tenure as an MSA food service user.

"It's not overstating things to suggest that the adoption of MSA has been one of the cornerstones of this business' success," said Bob Singleton, whose family has owned and managed the hotel for 20 years.

The Pineapple is one of Brisbane's oldest hotels, built in 1864, and arguably one of Australia's largest and most successful family-owned pub steakhouse venues.

The launch of the MSA pilot in Brisbane in 1997-98 coincided with a major expansion of the business, which included the development of a 300-seat steakhouse restaurant.

"We put MSA beef on the menu from day one of the pilot and that has never changed," Mr Singleton said. "We knew our reputation and our ability to attract customer loyalty would sink or swim on whether we could serve a consistently tender steak, 52 weeks a year. MSA has delivered that."

Inner city Brisbane is arguably one of the most competitive casual steak dining markets in the world,



**LEFT:** Pineapple Hotel steakhouse owner Bob Singleton holds his original 1998 MSA licence, while head chef Dave Cannon showcases a sample of the popular Cape Grim Tasmanian grassfed MSA beef served at the steakhouse.

with more than a dozen large, successful establishments near the city – many attached to old hotels.

Whereas the MSA program in its infancy was focused squarely on delivering consistent tenderness, that was now largely accepted as a 'given', and many customers were now searching for something else in the steak menu, Mr Singleton said.

In the Pineapple's case, that 'something else' is flavour, or more specifically, celebrating the differences in flavour between the wide

variety of product now graded under MSA. Four brands are regularly used, including Cape Grim, Nolans, CAAB and Diamantina, each offering a different brand story, breeding and feeding background, and flavour profile.

Mr Singleton said in the Pineapple's case, it had tended to steer away from stocking commercial MSA-backed beef brands that were also available in the retail supermarket. "We don't necessarily want to have something on the

menu that customers can also pick up at Woolworths," he said.

He supported the view that MSA could do with a renewed marketing push in the domestic market in coming years, to lift the program's recognition and acceptance.

"Lots of kids, who were teenagers the last time the industry spent serious money on promoting MSA, are now in their mid to late 20s, and earning six-figure salaries. We need to think about re-engaging more with the younger generation."

The Pineapple's executive chef Dave Cannon, who has worked in the steakhouse since its inception, said complaints over tenderness were "very, very rare".

"Customers understand right from the word go that MSA carries its own credibility, and that what they get is going to be a good, if not superior quality product," he said.

The Pineapple steak menu lists almost a dozen different steak cut options, but the MSA 'mission statement' takes pride of place at the top.

"By having that overarching MSA identity, people know they are going to get a good steak regardless of whether they choose a grassfed or grainfed option, rump or eye fillet," he said. "One of the messages we are sending is there is a lot of variety now within quality beef in terms of flavour, age and finishing background, and it all eats well under MSA. With grassfed product having the reputation for more inconsistency in tenderness, MSA is

providing outlets like this with the confidence to offer more grassfed menu items, knowing they are going to eat well every time.

"Six or eight years ago, we offered very little grassfed, because of that risk factor."

One of the newer products to feature on the Pineapple menu is MSA-backed Cape Grim beef, produced by Greenhams at its Smithton plant in Tasmania. This is a pasturefed product from heavier, 18 to 36-month-old, high-performance Angus animals, bred and grown in a pristine natural environment. The product produces an abundance of marbling, more like grainfed beef. Almost all of the Cape Grim bodies grade MSA boning groups 1-4, placing it at an elite level within the MSA spectrum.

Over the past two years, Cape Grim has established an important niche at the upper end of the Australian food service industry, as well as into export markets in Korea and Japan. Sydney celebrity chef Neil Perry, who uses Cape Grim in his Rockpool restaurant, was one of the first to seize on the flavour profile delivered by the product.

"In Australia we tend to eat a lot of yearling beef, which tends to be lighter in flavour, but this product has a more pronounced beef flavour – a wonderful long, clean, natural beef taste," he said.