

**HETEROTROPHIC PRODUCTION OF  
THE MICROALGAE *Cyclotella cryptica*;  
FEED FOR AQUACULTURE**

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A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

May 2010

SCHOOL OF CHEMICAL ENGINEERING  
THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE  
AUSTRALIA

*"All truths are easy to understand once they are discovered;  
the point is to discover them."*

Galileo Galilei, (1564 – 642)

## ABSTRACT

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Feed cost and feed availability is a major bottleneck for the aquaculture industry and has prompted significant research into identifying new microalgal strains and/or growth conditions that reduce production costs, increase the ease of cultivation and improve the nutritional value of the cultivated biomass. The nutritional value of microalgal biomass depends on several physiological and biochemical attributes including microalgal cell size and shape, digestibility, non-toxicity and biochemical composition. The growth rate and biochemical composition of microalgal biomass can be influenced by culture and environmental conditions.

Heterotrophic cultivation systems are a potential alternative to the more traditional photoautotrophic cultivation systems, which typically suffer from low biomass concentrations, high production costs and unexplained ‘*crashes*’. This thesis presents the investigations undertaken into the heterotrophic cultivation of the diatom *Cyclotella cryptica* (UTEX 1269). *C. cryptica* was chosen as a model organism as this species is capable of heterotrophic growth, has previously been used within aquaculture and was recommended as a species worthy of further investigations. The effects of major nutritional and environmental factors on the growth and biochemical characteristics were studied in 250 mL Erlenmeyer flasks, 500 mL Schott bottles and 19 L carboys. The results from this investigation are unique as the optimal heterotrophic growth conditions were previously either not known or reported.

The major contributions from this research are the increased knowledge of the effects of the concentration of glucose, sodium metasilicate and nitrogen source (sodium nitrate, urea and ammonium chloride) on the growth dynamics and biomass productivity of *C. cryptica* and the effects of the nitrogen availability (sodium nitrate, urea and ammonium chloride) on the fatty acid composition and total fatty acid content. In addition, there is now an increased knowledge of the effects of the cultivation temperature, salinity, pH and degree of mixing or agitation on the growth dynamics and biomass productivity of *C. cryptica* and the effects of the cultivation temperature and salinity on the fatty acid composition and total fatty acid content. The calculated specific growth rates in

heterotrophic culture were in the order of  $0.05 \text{ h}^{-1}$ , which are comparable to the photoautotrophic growth rates reported in the literature. The most predominant fatty acids synthesised by *C. cryptica* under heterotrophic growth conditions were palmitic acid (16:0), palmitoleic acid (16:1 *n*-7), stearidonic acid (18:4 *n*-3, SDA), eicosapentaenoic acid (20:5 *n*-3, EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (22:6 *n*-3, DHA). These fatty acids are similar to the fatty acids synthesised under photoautotrophic conditions. An economic assessment confirmed that the biomass production costs were sensitive to the biomass concentration. The cost of producing *C. cryptica* biomass under heterotrophic cultivations in a 100 L commercial bioreactor, at a steady state biomass concentration of  $30 \text{ g.L}^{-1}$ , was estimated at approximately AU \$180 per kg. This cost, although high, is reasonable given photosynthetic microalgal production costs in small hatcheries is up to AU \$750 - \$1000 per kg. Unit production costs were sensitive to the steady-state biomass concentration and a steady-state biomass concentration of  $2 \text{ g.L}^{-1}$  resulted in the unit production cost increasing to approximately AU \$2,675 per kg.

## **STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY**

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This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution to Stephen Luke Pahl and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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I would like to begin by thanking my supervisors, Dr David Lewis and Professor Keith King (School of Chemical Engineering, The University of Adelaide) and Professor Steven (Feng) Chen (School of Biological Sciences, The University of Hong Kong) for their support and guidance. It has been with great privilege that I have had the opportunity to work with these three outstanding academics and thank them for their input, encouragement and assistance with my professional development.

I am extremely grateful to Mr Garry Penney and Ms Sonia Elts (School of Molecular and Biomedical Sciences, The University of Adelaide) and Mark Mano (CSIRO – Health Sciences and Nutrition) for allowing me access to their equipment. I am also enormously appreciative of Dr Keith Fan (School of Biological Sciences, The University of Hong Kong) for his aid throughout the initial stages of the project.

I appreciated the effort of the support staff within the School of Chemical Engineering who assisted in the construction of experimental apparatus and with the management of the facilities. A special mention goes to my colleagues, Dr Kyleigh Victory and Mr Michael Roberts, for their time and thoughts during the countless morning and afternoon teas full of planning and procrastination. I would also like to thank my friends outside of university for their support, encouragement and the sharing of some amiable festivities.

This project in part had the financial support from the Australian Research Council, Australian Postgraduate Awards and the School of Chemical Engineering at the University of Adelaide. The Research Abroad Scholarship from the University of Adelaide was very appreciated to allow me an opportunity to travel and undertake research at the University of Hong Kong.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for their encouragement throughout my PhD and personal endeavours. Thanks must also go to my wife Lisa, for her unrelenting love, support and patience.

## LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

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The publications produced during this research are listed below:

### Journal papers

**Pahl SL**, Lewis DM, Chen F, King KD (2010) Growth dynamics and the proximate biochemical composition and fatty acid of the heterotrophically grown diatom *Cyclotella cryptica*. *Journal of Applied Phycology* 22: 165-171.

**Pahl SL**, Lewis DM, Chen F, King KD (2010) Heterotrophic growth and nutritional aspects of the diatom *Cyclotella cryptica* (Bacillariophyceae): Effect of some environmental factors. *Journal of Bioscience and Bioengineering* 109: 235-239.

**Pahl SL**, Lewis DM, Chen F, King KD (2010) Heterotrophic growth and nutritional aspects of the diatom *Cyclotella cryptica* (Bacillariophyceae): Effect of nitrogen source and concentration. *Journal of Bioscience and Bioengineering* (In Review).

### Conference papers

**Pahl SL**, Lewis DM, Schwarz, M. Chen F (2003) Advantages of heterotrophically grown microalgae for aquaculture – economic and environmental. Environmental Engineering Research Event (EERE). Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. December 2003, CD-ROM.

**Pahl SL**, Schwarz M, Chen F, Lewis DM (2003) Experimental techniques used to determine the nutritional content of microalgae. CHEMECA 2003. Adelaide, South Australia, Australia. October 2003. CD-ROM.

**Conference abstracts**

**Pahl SL**, Lewis DM, Chen F, King KD (2006) Heterotrophic growth of *Cyclotella cryptica* for aquaculture. Skretting Australasian Aquaculture Conference, 27 – 30 August 2006. Adelaide, South Australia, Australia. CD-ROM.

**Pahl SL**, Lewis DM, Chen F (2005) Proximate biochemical composition and fatty acid profile of the diatom *Cyclotella cryptica* under heterotrophic growth conditions. Abstracts and Program of the 10th International Conference on Applied Phycology, 24 – 28 July 2005. Kunming, China. pp. 50-51.

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