

## **Submission to the Legislative Council Inquiry into Fin Fish Farming in Tasmania**

I am writing to the Inquiry as a concerned citizen, and born and bred Tasmanian. I am well-educated and well-travelled, who enjoys spending time on the water in the Derwent, around Bruny Island, Maria Island and the Tasman Peninsular. I am passionate about this State, and write to express my great disappointment about the way the fin fish farming industry operates here.

It is my observation that Bruny Island, Huon River, Southport, Nubeena and Oakhampton Bay waterways have been damaged by poor aquaculture practices. The inshore leases continue to expand, and now, enormous offshore leases have been granted in Storm Bay.

My concerns relate to fish overpopulation, fish health, and governance issues.

This presents a gap between the expectations of Tasmanians and the behaviour of the government and the fin fish industry. This is not compatible with "Brand Tasmania".

The behaviour and actions of both the fin fish industry, and the government belies a gap between reality and our expectations as Tasmanians of what the aquaculture industry should strive to be. This risks damage to Tasmania's reputation on the global stage and as such, is incompatible with the brand of Tasmania.

### **The Fin Fish Industry**

It is my belief that the fin fish farming industry does not conduct its activities with respect for the community. This reduces industry's social license to operate because they do not act as responsible corporate citizens. There are good reasons for Tasmanians to have concerns with the industry, as demonstrated by the following:

- fish excrement and residual fish food that collects under the pens and causes seabeds to become marine deserts
- fish carrying diseases such as POMV/Herpes virus, which have the potential to infect other species via natural tidal flows, fresh water flows, waves and storm action
- these diseases are treated with chemicals, antibiotics and vaccines, and when released into the water, become a biosecurity and environmental risk
- fish escape regularly, competing with and preying on other species living in the environment
- equipment which regularly lost through deterioration and weather events causing navigation hazards. This is demonstrated by the amount of detritus retrieved from beaches and the water by locals. This marine debris poses great risk to all other water users, including possible fowl ups, prop entanglement, hull damage, sinking, and in the worst case scenario, potential loss of life
- employment opportunities are often cited as beneficial, but jobs numbers are minimal, and will reduce further with the addition of well boats

### **The Government**

Confidence in the state government is at risk and reduced by not regulating the industry effectively. I understand that:

- there is a lack of independent regulation, which has caused mistrust and push back against industry development
- there has been an expansion of leases approved before the environmental impact studies have concluded, and international scientific evidence around best practice has been dismissed
- penalties are insufficient and do not represent a genuine deterrent

- industry practices are not appropriately regulated, managed or policed. When penalties are imposed, they are disputed and dismissed via legal action
- the industry makes enormous profits, yet the leases in Tasmanian waterways are undervalued to the detriment of the state's economy. Meanwhile, Scandinavian countries charge much higher fees and obtain good returns for the use of their pristine resources
- lost equipment is notified by self-report, and done poorly, as demonstrated by the amount of gear retrieved from beaches and the water
- in Macquarie Harbour there was a clear overpopulation of fish and associated pollution, which resulted in massive fish deaths and job losses. It appeared, as a spectator, that no-one had the power, courage or responsibility to intervene and stop the disaster
- further growth is unsustainable, and the immediate history does not give Tasmanians any good reason to trust that these issues will be properly administered
- regulations surrounding the use of well boats, their discharge, noise and light pollution are needed but not in place.

### **What I want to see**

I am seeking open decisions, made according to independent scientific research, and a transparent process. Fin Fish industry operations need to be conducted in a genuinely sustainably manner. Specifically:

- Responsible and rigorous processes implemented for appropriate lease valuation and review to avoid lease grants occurring before environmental impact assessments are complete. The Scandinavian and Canadian processes and regulation for managing aquaculture may provide some valuable insights for a model.
- Those regulations to be properly implemented and policed.
- Increased and enforceable penalties to act as a genuine deterrent
- Firm action from the Tasmanian Government to avoid the real risk of undermining the greater marine environment for both wildlife and recreational boating community.
- Learnings to be taken from the damage done to Macquarie Harbour.

In summary, I am concerned that the state does not apply the highest level of rigor, care and responsibility around the fin fish industry. Strict regulations need to be imposed in order to avoid creating more environmental harm, to protect our environment, and by extension, our reputation. In addition, there needs to be a reasonable return to the state on commercial profit for the use of our (once pristine) waterways.

*Cheryl Cushion*

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