TASMANIAN ALLIANCE for MARINE PROTECTION
www.tamp.org.au tasmarineprotection@yahoo.com
Interim Chair: Peter George 0426 150 369,

Tasmanian Alliance for Marine Protection

Submission to: Legislative Council Government Administration Committee 'A' Committee inquiry into planning, assessment, operation and regulation of finfish farming in Tasmania.

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To:
Legislative Council Government Administration Committee 'A' Committee inquiry into planning, assessment, operation and regulation of finfish farming in Tasmania

November 28, 2019

Peter George
Interim Chair,
Tasmanian Alliance for Marine Protection
Tel: 0426 150 369

The committee of the Tasmanian Alliance for Marine Protection (TAMP) respectfully addresses its submission to Members of the Legislative Council Committee A and seeks the opportunity to address the committee's members in person during the committee's hearings.

Cordially,
***Peter George* (electronically signed)**

Peter George,
Interim Chair.
Introduction:

The Tasmanian Alliance for Marine Protection (TAMP) was formed in 2018 amidst increasing statewide concern that community doubts about the impact of salmon farming in Tasmania were not being adequately addressed by the industry or by government.

These groups include coastal and riverside communities directly affected by fish farming while both recreational and professional fishers are represented in the alliance.

The broad agenda of TAMP is to promote greater transparency in the governance and operations of fish farms in the state, to establish independent oversight of the industry and to work towards fish farming operations moving to genuine off-shore locations or on-shore in closed-loop operations.
(see Appendix 1)

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Scope of Submission:

Individual groups that fit under the TAMP umbrella plan separately to address issues of particular concern to them.

The committee will find that common themes are

1. Lack of transparency by both government and industry that undermines confidence in the whole fish farming enterprise in Tasmania.
2. Failure to provide timely, independent and scientifically-validated information about the impact of fish farming on marine ecology both in the long-term and for episodic events such as fish deaths, escapes, biosecurity and other effects on public waterways.
3. Failure of DIPIPWE, EPA and industry to adequately address noise and light issues that impact health and happiness in communities affected by fish farm operations and their boat and shipping movements.
4. Use and access to public water sources and TasWater facilities without proper public consultation or explanation of costs and payments for water use.
5. The development of proper and easily-accessible means to report concerns about fish farm operations, noise, light, debris and pollution.

There is no one-stop shop available to the public to report concerns, no clear pathway towards achieving a resolution and limited public reporting of issues that are or should be of concern to the public, particularly users of waterways, coastal communities or businesses and industries adversely affected by fish farm operations.

TAMP brings to the committee's attention seven issues of particular concern to TAMP's statewide membership but stresses that individual members and groups may wish to address other areas of concern.

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1). Effluent (Committee Terms of Reference 1b & 2c)

The volumes of effluent in a concentrated space caused by a salmon pen are unprecedented in the natural environment. Much of the seabed under a salmon pen is smothered in fish wastes and major alterations to the ecology of the surrounding area occurs, particularly in shallow, sheltered bays.

For a current, easy example for the committee we urge you to undertake a site visit to Long Bay/Stingaree Bay, north of Stewarts Bay, on the Tasman Peninsula.

Once a pristine marine area full of seagrasses and fish breeding areas it is now a fouled, algal bloom-infested bay where the native sea grasses and fringing reefs are dying and the natural environment is severely compromised.

The salmon pens' effluent has dramatically changed the ecology of the area. Here is clear evidence of the impact of fish farms. It is in clear breach of the government's own Sustainable Industry Growth Plan for the Salmon Industry and highlights the over-production of fish in sensitive areas, the absence of due scientific diligence.

TAMP members in the abalone industry report damage from effluent silt covering fish reefs and surrounding areas. This is backed-up by independent surveys.

Scientific testing in the vicinity of salmon hatcheries revealed high levels of pollutants in the Derwent and Florentine rivers that supply Hobart's drinking water. There is video that illustrates the contrast between the waters above the hatcheries that is pristine and the polluted waters below (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L0bhcp5VcnA). High nutrient levels downstream of hatcheries have also been documented by the Derwent Estuary Program, as part of a two year monitoring program (https://www.derwentestuary.org.au/assets/River_Derwent_and_Catchment_Tributary_Water_Quality_Report_2018.pdf).

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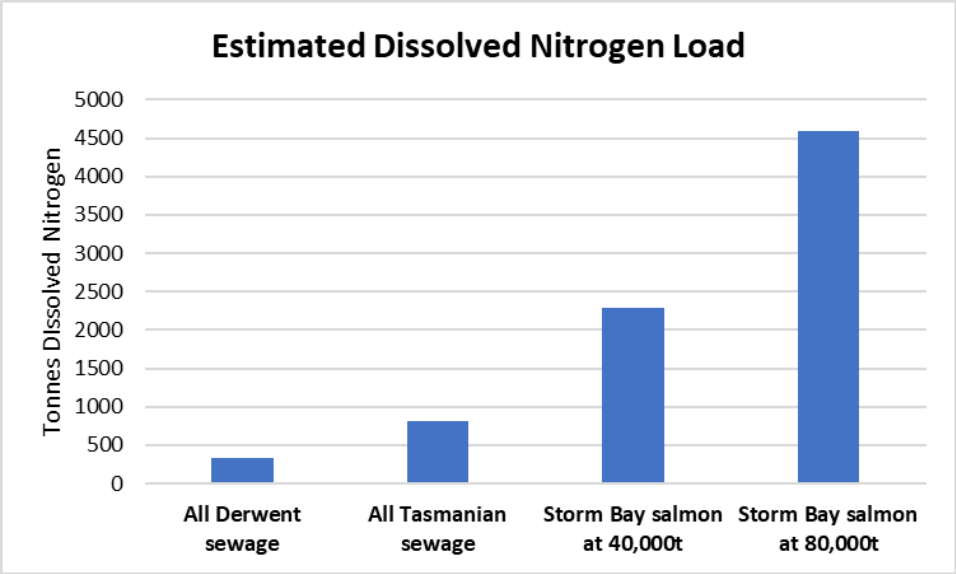
1). Effluent (Committee Terms of Reference 1b & 2c continued)

It is estimated that the load of nutrients from the proposed 80,000 tonne expansion of fish farming in Storm Bay would amount to more than 14 times the total sewage load from the Hobart municipal area, or more than five times the sewage load for the whole of Tasmania.



Solution:

A deadline must be established to halt the release of effluents into public waterways. This will promote a move by the industry into true deep, off-shore waters or on to shore-based closed-loop (RAS) facilities following global trends that are already underway. (https://salmonbusiness.com/these-are-the-leading-land-based-salmon-farms-in-the-world-right-now/).

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2). Site selection and approval (Committee Terms of Reference 2a & 2b)

Tasmania's selection and approval process is far from world's best practice.

Norwegian authorities look at sites, apply rigorous research and science, then establish the pen quotas and fallowing regulations to ensure that each site remains ecologically sustainable. A lease auction follows with these regulations already in place. Adjacent communities become major recipients of income from the leases.

In Tasmania ad hoc site selection is driven by industry with poor transparency. Rather than careful science-based selection, the methodology of "adaptive management" results in addressing ecological problems in hindsight.

The experience of Macquarie Harbour is an object lesson in the consequences of adaptive management.

A particular concern raised by multiple scientists is that the expansion into Storm Bay has started without completing the necessary monitoring, modelling and other scientific studies needed to ensure sustainable growth. Instead, regulators should put a conservative cap of, say, 5,000 tonnes of fish in the first operating cycle, gradually increasing if impacts on the marine environment are shown to be within acceptable limits. Instead the industry is aiming at an 80-thousand tonne target in Storm Bay alone.

For any area of such importance socially, economically and environmentally, assessments of potential impact should be made on a cumulative basis - not on individual leases.

Solution:

Proper site selection with full and transparent scientific analysis of the impacts, designated fallowing periods, independent monitoring and publicly available records must be part of each lease licence, as well as for the wider region.

All licences should be auctioned with a set of management and sustainability conditions included at the time of auction.

All salmon hatcheries must become closed-loop.

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3). Transparency (Committee Terms of Reference 1a & 3)

Transparency is key to the future of aquaculture in Tasmania. This has been acknowledged by the EPA's Mr Wes Ford (https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-09-12/huon-aquaculture-salmon-death-revealed-amid-transparency-calls/10230846), in the government's own sustainable growth plan for the salmon industry and as far back as a dozen years in international initiatives (ie: https://www.seafoodsource.com/features/can-transparency-improve-salmons-image).

Claims by government and industry to be making efforts towards greater transparency fail to convince.

In the past 12 months, a million farmed salmon reportedly died during a jelly fish bloom. Huon Aquaculture initially denied the numbers and attacked environment groups when they suggested a significant death event.

The truth was only fully revealed when impairment to the profits was reported to the stock exchange.

Too often fish deaths, fish disease, fish escapes and listeria outbreaks emerge from whistleblowers in the industry - not from transparent reporting.

Both Tassal and Huon Aquaculture run public information sessions that are carefully choreographed and are rarely if ever chaired by an independent moderator. Community participants are frequently disappointed to find these sessions are exercises in public relations with little opportunity to have important questions asked and answered.

At the Glamorgan Spring Bay Council a fiasco in fresh water management is unfolding with little transparency or explanation of industry needs for fresh water and how it will be sourced.

Local communities are frustrated when seeking answers on this issue from the industry, TasWater or DIPIWE.

Solution:

Genuine efforts need to be made to force fish farms to release timely information about all their activities, including fish escapes, disease, mortalities, effluent, antibiotic use, seabed changes, debris from operations and any other impacts on communities, the environment and safe navigation. This should be enforced by legislation.

Government processes need to be simplified and easily accessible to public scrutiny. A one-stop reporting shop should be established to report concerns and breaches of regulations and to keep public records of those concerns, breaches and enforcement practices.

The application of commercial-in-confidence should be abandoned when the activities are carried out on public waterways and lands particularly as so many of the activities of salmon farms impact surrounding areas.

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4). Ecological damage. (Committee Terms of Reference 1b & 2a)
&
5). Marine Pollution. (Committee Terms of Reference 1b & 2a,2b,2c)

Last year the Marine Farming Planning Review Panel undertook to provide one of our member organisations baseline marine science reports for lease areas. This would allow real comparison to be made between original marine conditions and those now observed in and around leases over time. These baseline reports have still not been provided.

The same organisation recently spoke with a DIPIPWE officer who courteously explained that some original survey information no longer existed, could probably not be found or was not available digitally.

This illustrates the difficulty that any concerned organisation has in trying to quantify the impact of fish farming on Tasmania's coastal waters and rivers.

A TAMP member with specialist knowledge of jelly fish warns of increasing threat from jellyfish infestation in Tasmania's warming waters. They are attracted to the environment surrounding the salmon pens where there is a reduced level of oxygen and a high concentration of nitrates.

Community groups do not have - and cannot be expected to have - the resources to conduct their own investigations. They can plainly see the impact of the fish farms on the environment. Yet the lack of publicly available scientific data and regulatory reports makes it impossible for dismayed locals to make fully informed complaints that are taken seriously. If companies and government dispute what seems to be clear to residents, independent science needs to be the final arbiter.

Whole ecosystems have been and are being altered by the presence of excessive levels of nitrates and ammonia in the water from the pens.

It seems obvious that ever increasing algal blooms will occur such as those being witnessed at Port Arthur and Nubeena. This is also occurring downstream of hatcheries, including those on Florentine, Tyenna and Derwent rivers.

The damage to wild fish stocks, and to commercial and recreational fishing, is potentially enormous, especially as waters off southeastern Tasmania are warming and under increasing stress.

Solution:

The precautionary principle of minimising harm and science-based decision making must be rigorously imposed.

Where the science is considered inadequate by independent authority, then the licence should not be issued and industrial farming should cease.

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6). Poor regulation & enforcement (Committee Terms of Reference 2a & 3)

This year two marine scientists resigned from the Marine Farming Planning Review Panel (and put their future employment at risk) in the wake of that panel's review of expansion plans for Storm Bay. (https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-02-25/tas-salmon-experts-letter-reveals-reasons-for-quitting-board/10844520)

The resignations again highlighted the inadequacy and lack of transparency of this process.

TAMP's affiliate, Neighbours of Fish Farming (NOFF), has conducted a close study of access to information on the websites of the fish farming companies and of the various authorities that regulate and supervise. NOFF found more confusion than clarity that would confound any member of the public. (https://neighboursoffishfarming.org.au/)

Solution:

The Marine Farming Planning Review Panel (MFPRP) should have a broader representation. It must include independent marine scientists, users of the waterways and independent community representation.

There should be set standards against which all recommendations can be made.

Decisions currently delegated to the EPA chair should in future be made by the MFPRP and/or EPA Board and those decisions must be made with full transparency and publicly accessible.

Essential information about the operations of fish farms needs to be standardised and made easily accessible on-line.

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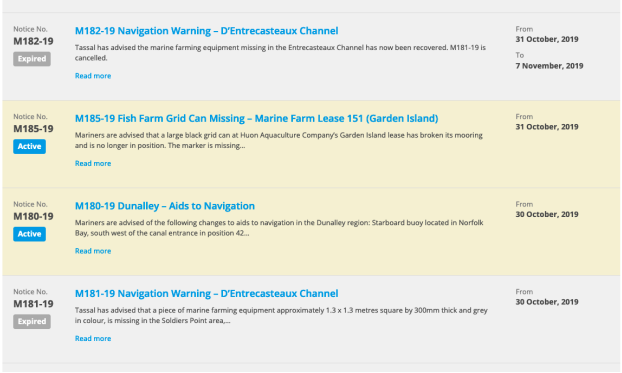
7). Marine Debris (Committee Terms of Reference 2C & 3):

The issue of marine debris is not just one of unsightly beachfront fouling. It is one of potentially lasting ecological harm from plastics lost from fish farms. Even more crucially it is one of safety on the water - the safety of mariners can be put at risk by marine debris when it is large or when it is just below the water surface. Mariners tell TAMP they fear it is a matter of time before a fatality is caused - that is, if one has not already been caused without being recognised as such.

While it is beyond the resources of community organisations to keep a tally of marine debris, Notices to Mariners display a cornucopia of warnings about marine debris emanating from fish farm operations. Below is a partial screenshot of just one day's notices.



Notice No.		
M182-19 (Expired)	M182-19 Navigation Warning – D'Entrecasteaux Channel Tassal has advised the marine farming equipment missing in the Entrecasteaux Channel has now been recovered. M181-19 is cancelled. Read more	From 31 October, 2019 To 7 November, 2019
M185-19 (Active)	M185-19 Fish Farm Grid Can Missing – Marine Farm Lease 151 (Garden Island) Mariners are advised that a large black grid can at Huon Aquaculture Company's Garden Island lease has broken its mooring and is no longer in position. The marker is missing... Read more	From 31 October, 2019
M180-19 (Active)	M180-19 Dunalley – Aids to Navigation Mariners are advised of the following changes to aids to navigation in the Dunalley region: Starboard buoy located in Norfolk Bay, south west of the canal entrance in position 42... Read more	From 30 October, 2019
M181-19 (Expired)	M181-19 Navigation Warning – D'Entrecasteaux Channel Tassal has advised that a piece of marine farming equipment approximately 1.3 x 1.3 metres square by 300mm thick and grey in colour, is missing in the Soldiers Point area,... Read more	From 30 October, 2019

The size of marine debris ranges from the piles of rubbish collected by waterfront residents and other members of the public on a daily basis to large and formidable fish farm equipment.

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7). Marine Debris (Committee Terms of Reference 2C & 3 continued):

One dog-walk on the beach can collect a considerable amount of debris.

In July 2018, the Tasmanian government announced a zero tolerance policy for marine debris. In April 2019, a freedom of information request revealed no fines issued from 2014 to 2016, four fines in 2018 totalling $2445, and nine fines in 2019 to the value of $5,928. (https://www.themercury.com.au/business/data-from-dpipwe-shows-the-number-of-fines-has-more-than-doubled/news-story/c80cfac9cabb6e8d45fecfa7e8fe150a)

Crucially, no information is collated on the amount of debris collected on an annual basis so it is impossible to assess the quantity of equipment lost from fish farms, the amount recovered or the number of incidents that actually occur daily, monthly or annually.

A spokesperson for the Minister for Primary Industry, Mr Guy Barnett, said “the eight infringement notices issued since last year showed the zero tolerance policy was working.” (https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-04-16/salmon-industry-paying-pittance-for-marine-debris-fines/11020926)

TAMP contends it reveals quite the opposite.

Huon Aquaculture reports it spent 800 working hours in one year just cleaning up foreshores - without revealing the number of hours spent attempting to retrieve debris still on the water. No clearer acknowledgment could be made of the extent of the problem than the amount of time required to clean up the detritus of just one company’s spoil.

Many, many more hours have been put in by unpaid members of the public and local residents clearing debris from the beaches with neither reward nor thanks over the years.

Whatever the acknowledged or unacknowledged level of risk to mariners, whatever the threat to the coastline and to otherwise-pristine waterways, whatever the damage to the state’s marine ecology, what is clear is that fish farms seem to view the issue of marine debris as no more than the “cost of doing business”.

For an industry approaching the billion-dollar mark, the penalties are risible, enforcement negligible, authorities understaffed and underfunded. TAMP understands there are just two enforcement officers at work on supervision although our organisation has been unable to confirm the figure and hopes the committee will be able to do so. (https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-04-16/salmon-industry-paying-pittance-for-marine-debris-fines/11020926)

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7). Marine Debris (Committee Terms of Reference 2C & 3 continued):

In light of the evidence, TAMP questions the statement of the Salmonid Growers Association that "the industry developed a Code of Practice for the Prevention, Control and Re-use of Marine Debris to provide guidelines for standard aquaculture practices in line with the State Government's 'zero tolerance' to marine debris." https://www.themercury.com.au/business/data-from-dpipwe-shows-the-number-of-fines-has-more-than-doubled/news-story/c80cfac9cabb6e8d45fecfa7e8fe150a

There seems no evidence to back-up the claim that there is a code of practice being followed or enforced.

Solution:

A rigid, enforceable, strictly-supervised "zero tolerance" policy towards marine debris and pollution must be implemented immediately.

Penalties should be introduced that reflect the severity of the offence of polluting waterways and endangering mariners.

The aquaculture industry must face large fines and removal of licences to ensure that penalties are not merely part of the cost of doing business on public waterways.

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Executive Summary:

The Tasmanian Alliance for Marine Protections and its membership are firmly of the view that this one industry has been given priority over others. In part, this reflects the intense lobbying efforts of the industry along with an unhealthily close relationship between industry, government and regulators.

This favouritism has a strong potential for economic detriment to those other industries with equal or greater claim to benefit Tasmania's economy.

In particular, commercial and recreational fishing are very strong economic components of the Tasmanian economy but are treated like second-rate cousins to the finfish industry. Commercial wild fishers are subject to far more scrutiny and production rigour. Under no circumstances would they be allowed to pollute Tasmanian waters the way the salmon industry currently does and will increasingly do based on current issued licences.

Other industries such as tourism are also negatively impacted by the operations of finfish farming and may be more so if Tasmania's reputation for its "clean, green image" is diminished.

TAMP urges the salmon industry to start the process of removing its activities from coastal waters, rivers and estuaries into truly deep off-shore waters or into closed-loop RAS farms ashore. It further urges the government to support such a move by encouraging research and restricting the industry from further expansion in Tasmanian waterways.

TAMP commends the committee of the Tasmanian Legislative Council for holding this inquiry and hopes for an outcome that satisfies a population increasingly concerned about the despoliation of our waterways.

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Appendix 1:

The Tasmanian Alliance for Marine Protections (TAMP) objectives are to:

1. Engage in meaningful community discussion about the expansion of industrial fish farming in Tasmanian coastal waters with complete transparency of the current and future impact & activities of open net fish farming.
2. Hold the industrial fin fish farming industry to account for past, current and potential environmental damage resulting from its activities and ensure appropriate penalties and remediation are undertaken.
3. Establish the introduction of sound, independent, precautionary science evaluation of the impact of fish farming operations on our coastal marine environment
4. Work towards the eventual relocation of industrial fish farming from coastal waters to offshore or close loop land based.
5. Conduct promotional and educational activities to inform Tasmanian's and the broader Australian community of the impacts of coastal open net fish farming and the consequences for the Tasmanian marine environment.