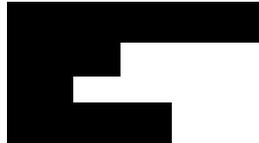


**Legislative Council Sessional Committee Government Administration A
Sub-Committee: Fin Fish Farming in Tasmania Inquiry**

Submission to Committee by Rowland (Mick) Chalmers



28 November 2019

I am extremely concerned about the expansion of fin fish farming in Tasmania.

I am now retired but like most Tasmanians have a love for our natural environment and the opportunities it provides for us all to enjoy it. I have been involved in ocean swimming, surfing and recreational fishing most of my life and take pride in seeing my children and grandchildren pursuing similar interests.

I understand the importance of industry to the economy and employment and am not anti-fish farming by nature.

My concerns are

- **Lack of Scientific Basis and Adequate Regulation:** It seems that development of fish farming has been conducted without adequate regulation and without thorough consideration of the science and of the environmental consequences of the industry.

I think this is evidenced by several things including

- The fact that the areas of the Channel where fish farms are established are now virtually denuded of marine life. It is now difficult in the wider areas to catch a feed of fish. It is a widespread belief that the decline of fishing catches in the area is linked to fish farming. I have not met a recreational fishing or diving person who does not share this view
 - the problems caused by overstocking in Macquarie Harbour. I recall marine scientists predicting the disaster that would occur when farming was expanded in the harbour. Their concerns were dismissed by the Regulators and Government but those scientists were proved correct.
 - the fact that marine debris from fish farms is now regularly found in waters around Tasmania and as far away as New Zealand. Damage has been caused to boats. Despite this only a few token paltry fines have been imposed on the perpetrators who I believe are expected to secure 100% of their gear on site.
- **Lack of Open and Transparent Processes:** I believe a great deal of secrecy has surrounded the development of policy and regulation relating to fish farming. This is clearly not fostering objectivity in decision making and careful consideration of issues. There seems to be little or no transparency. I believe this is evidenced by the resignation of two expert members of the Marine Farming Planning Review Panel in 2019 after the Storm Bay decision. I think proceeding with the proposed expansion into Storm Bay

demonstrated a cavalier “development at all costs” mentality on the part of Government and the regulator. In my opinion the current expansion into Storm Bay is high risk in nature and will have a negative impact on recreational fishing

- **Potential for Foreign Ownership:** I believe that fish farming in Tasmania is extremely attractive to fish farming companies and investors at present. There are implications stemming from this. Lease costs in Tasmania are very low in relation to potential income generation. The Government seems to have a ‘develop at all costs philosophy’ The lack of industry regulation and underpinning Science in Tasmania enables fish farms to expand into sheltered waters like Storm Bay and the East Coast as opposed to the more environmentally sustainable areas like open ocean or ‘closed loop on land’ operations which are being developed in Europe and which are associated with a higher cost basis.

A consequence of this is that fish farming in Tasmania is very attractive to investors. High income can be generated by fish farming companies in a comparatively low cost environment. Tasmanian fish farming companies are open to takeover by foreign investors. This is happening in agriculture in Tasmania – a classic example being the Woolnorth farm which has been taken over by successive foreign owners in recent years. I think most Tasmanians would be horrified if one of our large salmon farming companies became foreign owned particularly if that foreign owner demonstrated a lack of environmental responsibility

- **Denigration of the Environment:** I am not a scientist but I know fish farms denigrate the environment largely due to the nitrogen they discharge. I guess that is why when diving near a fish farm there is very little evidence of life. What has happened to both the Channel and Macquarie Harbour prove that beyond doubt.

Fish farms are also ugly. They are a form of visual pollution. I can now see fish farms when surfing on South Arm and on the Tasman Peninsula. I have not been confronted by that in any other state of Australia or other country I have surfed in. At a time when others are developing surfing reserves, in Tasmania we are moving fish farms into areas where we surf. Storm Bay is home to half a dozen of Tasmania’s iconic surfing breaks. The presence of fish pens near these will do little to enhance the image of Tasmania to others.

- **One Last Concern; Sharks:** I have said I am no scientist. I do know however from experience as a surfer, swimmer and diver that fish farms attract seals. Seals attract sharks. Storm Bay and the East Coast are areas where there are already regular shark sightings. They are prime recreational areas for those involved in water sports and as a community we are lucky not to have had more incidents involving sharks and humans. The North Coast of NSW had several years where the presence of sharks impacted heavily on the community. While the reasons are not entirely known it is suggested that the larger than usual numbers of sharks on the coast of NSW in 2017 and 2018 were following food sources. I don’t think we should be placing thousands of tonnes of fish and salmon into Storm Bay until we are sure how this will impact on shark numbers around Bruny Island, South Arm and the Tasman Peninsula.