

**Text of a speech by Richard Flanagan
'Stop the Sea Grab' Rally
Hobart Town Hall 28 April 2021**

There is a story, a Tasmanian story, and it's the same story over and over, it's the story of gambling and it's the story of forestry and it's the story of the Hydro, and it's a story that goes all the way back to the invasion and the war with the Palawa, the attempted genocide and the slave society from which we come.

It's the story of power serving only itself and demanding with fear and menaces that we agree and submit, no matter the immensity of the cost.

That is why the battle that is now beginning against the salmon industry is for Tasmanians more than an environmental or community issue.

It is a battle for our island's soul, the moment we finally put an end to two centuries of fear and walked into the light of the twenty-first century a new people. A free people.

It should be self-evident that using Hobart's drinking water catchments as, in the words of one scientist, sewage settling ponds for salmon hatcheries, is not just wrong but dangerous; that risking the heavy metal contamination of our wild recreational fisheries with mercury poisoning as other scientists have pointed out, is not just careless but criminal, that firing near 40,000 seal bombs at defenceless seals in just one year is not just indefensible but systematic animal cruelty, that the destruction of one heart world after another along our coast is not just intolerable but immoral.

But it is not self-evident.

These things should be the subject of a full judicial investigation.

But in Tasmania they are not.

I cannot explain the curiously close relationship between leading bureaucrats, leading politicians and the salmon industry.

But I can say this much: it has to end.

It has to end so that the Tasmanian salmon industry has a future rather than it crashing. So Tasmanian salmon workers have jobs in a properly run industry, rather than risk the collapse of the entire industry.

And with it has to end two hundred years of fear and silence, so we might all have a better future with a new story for us all to live by.

For it to end we need to understand that we Tasmanians must now fight. That it will be a long fight and that it will be a hard fight. But it is not Tassal's Tasmania. It is our Tasmania. It is not Hunon Aquaculture or Petuna's Tasmania but our Tasmania.

And our way of life, our culture, demand respect and honouring, our waterways and their miraculous gift of creatures and life need protection—not contempt and destruction.

The EPA and the Marine Farming Branch need to understand their time is up as the salmon industry's enforcer, enablers and cleaners. And the politicians need to know that their secrets and lies and silences will not prevail.

I want to tell the good people of Bridport, of Stanley, of the coast from Burnie to the west of Wynyard of what is coming for you. After the election the government—whether Liberal or Labor— will announce a sea grab, a coastal lock-up that will have already been decided by the salmon companies. There will be a costume of new words and terms—get ready for *marine spatial planning*— and new promises of science and consultation.

But it will be just one more act of profound bad faith on the part of government. It will be like it has been ever since 1985 when the science was ignored and they put the farms in D'Entrecasteaux Channel against the advice of the Norwegian specialists who set the industry up, it will be like when the expansion went in Macquarie Harbour and Okehampton Bay against the expert's advice, it will be just like in Storm Bay where even the possibility of mercury poisoning of a major recreational fishery couldn't stop the expansion.

You, your community and the science will, behind closed doors, be ignored. The only guarantee is that the decision was long ago made by the salmon companies and will be endorsed by government bodies and boards in bad faith, garlanded with sickening lies made by the politicians at the end.

And then the floating feed lots will start ring worming along the north coast, locking up your seas and bringing a long, slow death to your fishing grounds. Your beaches will slime. Your bays will fill with silt and grow algae. Jelly fish and seals will proliferate while so many other sea creatures will vanish and whole ecosystems collapse.

You will go to the government agencies and be ignored. You will discover that when it comes to salmon companies you have no rights as a citizen, that when you complain your complaints are not taken seriously. The glorious, beloved ocean horizons of the north will fill with the light and noise of heavy industry.

Stanley, one of the most beautiful of all Australian historic villages, will become an industrial hub, with noise and light 24/7. You will go to the politicians and they too will do nothing. And then you will go to the companies and they will lie to you and they will deceive you and they will betray you.

And some of you will—in your rage at what is happening, in your despair as you watch your beautiful north coast begin to die—some of you will stand up and speak out.

And then you too will get the late-night call: threatening your business, your name, your job, your future.

That's where we have got to on our beautiful island.

And that is why the election is the end of nothing. We know the salmon companies are silent in the confident expectation that the major parties will be returned to power and that they will continue to allow the salmon companies to do as they wish, how they wish, when they wish with our drinking water, with our coastal waters, with our heart places.

And I am here today to say it is over. It may take years, but it is over. Because we Tasmanians are not going to stop fighting, we are not going to stop calling out their abuses until it is over. Because Tasmanians are better than they are, because whatever your politics, your background, we share a belief that this island and us are joined, and we will not allow what we love to be destroyed because we are destroyed with it.

There are hard days, disappointing days, bitter days and months and years to come. We have to organise, we have to stay the course, we have to live a long winter.

But I promise you this: we shall prevail—and we shall win. Because in the end what remains, what is indestructible, is our love of our island.

Today is the beginning of when Tasmanians began to fight for Tasmania, for their heart worlds, their soul country, for our future, for a new better story for all instead of the old tales of destruction, bullying and the powerful taking all.

And in that long struggle we will not turn away, we shall prevail. And we shall win.

Thank you.