Statement by independent scientist and founding CEO of the highly-regarded Derwent Estuary Project, Christine Coughanowr:

Response to Mercury Talking Point (29 Aug 2021) – Christine Coughanowr:

Todd Walsh is known as a passionate river campaigner and has achieved some important results in his efforts to conserve Tasmania's giant freshwater crayfish.
However, I strongly disagree with the sweeping statements that he and Julian Amos make in the Mercury Talking Point of 29 August 2021 that inland salmon hatcheries (fish farms) have minimal impact on Tasmanian river systems and are well-regulated. This opinion is based on my 35 years of professional experience as a water quality scientist together with a review of reports that are in the public domain.
The impacts associated with a specific hatchery will depend on the individual river, the size of the hatchery and the treatment systems in place.
Furthermore, a robust assessment needs to consider multiple lines of evidence with respect to degradation – waterbugs are one of these, together with water quality and benthic algae.
Nutrients are a key concern, particularly during summer months when the salmon biomass in the hatcheries is typically at the highest levels, and when river flows are sluggish and water temperatures are elevated. Excess nutrients can lead to downstream algal blooms, including nuisance and toxic species.
Inflow/outflow and upstream/downstream monitoring data for flow-through hatcheries in the Derwent catchment at Wayatinah, Florentine, National Park, Karanja and below Meadowbank clearly show a major increase in nutrient levels, often by more than 50 times. This includes data collected by independent organisations as well as by the fish farms themselves (where they are required to report this information). I would expect similar results for other flow-through systems across the state.
In any case, whatever the claims being made – it is essential that the supporting reports and data are publicly available for scrutiny.
As regards EPA regulations, these vary considerably between the 18 hatcheries across the state – some have minimal controls and conditions, others are fairly extensive. These can be downloaded and reviewed on the LIST website for individual premises, and I have done this. The EPA has started requiring public Annual Environmental Reports to be published for hatcheries/inland fish farms, but at present this only applies to a handful, and these can be difficult to access. Public AERs should be required for all of these and be published on the LIST, alongside their Environmental Licenses.
The EPA urgently needs to set a clear policy and short timeline to transition the old-style flow- through fish farms to fully-recirculating systems.

Statement by Louise Cherrie, Environmental Consultant, Cherrie Consulting

Discharge limits have not been set by the EPA for all salmon hatcheries, despite expert recommendations to do so, and many are not required to prepare a publicly available Annual Environmental Review as is required for most other regulated premises in Tasmania meaning data is hard to collate.
However, it is unequivocal that hatchery discharges cause harm.
For Mr Walsh to call out limited ecological sampling results as proof of best practice is not logical.
I guess when actual discharges are concerning it provides a convenient distraction for a general audience.
As I found with the marine side of the salmon industry, the illusion falls apart under scrutiny.