



**Defending our Environment**

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# Towards a 10-Year Salmon Plan

## Discussion Paper, July 2022

Submission by

Neighbours of Fish Farming (NOFF)

August 2022

### **Principles**

1. It must do no harm
2. It must be safe for consumers, wildlife and fish stocks, neighbouring communities, and fish farm staff
3. It must be carbon neutral
4. There must be complete transparency
5. There must be a fair return to the community (Federal, State and Local Government) for use of Federal and State waterways, and the use of fresh water and other assets
6. It must acknowledge and respect the connection, rights and aspirations of traditional custodians on country, including sea country

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# 1. Introduction

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This submission is in response to the Discussion Paper on the proposed 10-Year Plan for the salmon industry<sup>1</sup>, modified in the light of the more recent release of the State Government's response to the Legislative Council's Finfish Enquiry<sup>2</sup>.

NOFF is a volunteer community group in southern Tasmania, with members in the D'Entrecasteaux Channel, the Huon Valley, and the far south coast. Our members live with the salmon industry's negative impacts on our waterways and environment. We are united by our belief that our waterways and communities must not be exploited or harmed. Our origins, growing membership and activities are a direct response to the salmon industry's unnecessary harm. We are working to achieve long-term change.

Our submission is influenced by the following considerations:

- Most of the Discussion Paper's questions can best be answered by reference to the report of the Legislative Council Fin Fish Enquiry<sup>3</sup>, which NOFF strongly supports and to which we made a detailed submission. The answers are in the Report. We see little value in repeating its detail here.
- Overall, the Discussion Paper is predicated on the assumption of business as usual. Its scope is specifically about salmon farming, not about the wider scope of aquaculture. It presupposes ongoing industry expansion without requiring significant, genuinely-innovative operational change.

To that extent, it is begging the question, with scope and wording designed to elicit pre-conceived answers.

- This is exacerbated by the Government's unsatisfactory and inadequate response to the Enquiry report. There are too many instances in the response where the Government claims to have already begun or completed a change, or where the wording says to investigate or plan, rather than to actually do anything. Tasmanians have had thirty years of a patronising industry and Government obfuscation, doublespeak and unfulfilled promises, and there is, justifiably, little community trust in this latest example.

Our recommendations are clearly highlighted throughout this submission. We will be pleased to answer any queries that arise: please contact Glenn Sanders, NOFF Secretary, at [secretary@neighboursoffishfarming.org.au](mailto:secretary@neighboursoffishfarming.org.au) or by phone on 0428 444 812.

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1 Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania: [Discussion paper: Towards a 10-year salmon plan](#), July 2022

2 Tasmanian Government: [Response to the Legislative Council Government Administration Sub-Committee 'A' Report on finfish farming in Tasmania](#), 16 August 2022

3 Legislative Council. Government Administration Committee 'A': [Report on finfish farming in Tasmania](#), 2022 no.15.

A simple SWOT<sup>4</sup> analysis of the current situation identifies the three significant threats to the Plan, and to the industry, set out below. These are not adequately addressed by the Discussion Paper, or, presumably, by the 10-Year Plan.

### a. Global warming and concomitant ocean warming

The oceans around Tasmania are warming faster than elsewhere in Australia because of global warming and the confluence of ocean currents<sup>5 6</sup>. Marine flora and fauna types are demonstrably changing in all localities<sup>7</sup>.

- It seems probable that Atlantic salmon will not remain a viable local product, as can be seen in the increasing frequency and number of salmon mortalities<sup>8</sup> from increased water temperatures and pest infestations.
- The discussion paper assumes that the industry will manage the risks and continue to expand, and it refers to Government training initiatives. Yet prudent governance and risk management requires contingency planning should things go wrong. This would affect employment, which is already being reduced by automation. When the automotive industry collapsed, Federal and State governments, industry and unions, all combined to re-skill and re-deploy workers.
- Tasmania needs a similar plan, funded in advance by the industry, ready to be activated in whole or in part should the need arise. The apparent lack of a contingency component in the Plan might be seen as an oversight, a lack of transparency, or an indication that employment numbers are predicted to be so low as to not require a contingency plan. If the last is the case, then it confirms the industry's frequent claims of significant Tasmanian employment are seriously exaggerated.

#### NOFF Recommendation 1

**In answer to Questions 13 and 14, NOFF therefore recommends that the Plan include risk management, especially re-deployment and re-skilling contingencies for situations where growth does not go as planned, and for that or other reasons employment is threatened.**

<sup>4</sup> Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SWOT\\_analysis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SWOT_analysis), August 2022.

<sup>5</sup> *Tasman Sea a "hotspot" for ocean warming*. Australian Geographic, 1 February 2012, viewed online at <https://www.australiangeographic.com.au/news/2012/02/tasman-sea-a-hotspot-for-ocean-warming/>, August 2022.

<sup>6</sup> *On land, Australia's rising heat is 'apocalyptic.' In the ocean, it's worse*. Washington Post, 27 Dec 2019, viewed online at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/world/climate-environment/climate-change-tasmania/>, August 2022.

<sup>7</sup> *Fish species opting for a sea change are making Tasmanian fishers happy* ABC Rural 13 August 2022. Viewed online at <https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2022-08-13/fish-species-move-tasmania-snapper-kingfish/> August 2022.

<sup>8</sup> *Tasmanian salmon companies report 68 instances of elevated fish deaths in 15 months*. ABC News, 7 July 2021, viewed online at <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-07-07/tasmanian-salmon-companies-instances-of-elevated-fish-death/100272186>, August 2022.

## b. Competition from much larger overseas organisations

NOFF's submission to the Finfish Enquiry<sup>9</sup> pointed to the threat from much larger overseas corporations. **This situation has not altered by recent takeovers:**

- Atlantic salmon are farmed in many countries, and marketed increasingly at the low-price end of the market. Apart from 'Brand Tasmania', our product is not unique.
- At present our industry markets these exotic salmon primarily to mainland Australia, as a high-value, high-cost product.
- Should a large corporation decide to move into the Australian market, or **should an existing overseas owner decide to source product for the Australian market elsewhere**, this could cause serious damage to Tasmania.

## c. The operations of the Tasmanian salmon industry

The extensive number of submissions to the Finfish Enquiry is more than sufficient evidence of the range of issues caused by the way the industry operates at present. Whether it is:

- pollution of waterways and shorelines
- industrial noise and light adjacent to residential areas
- animal welfare
- product safety and consumer health
- marine debris putting recreational waterway users at risk and adding to microplastic pollution of our oceans

These significant factors prove that the industry has a long way to go to achieve community acceptance and genuine world best practice.

**These are serious problems for management and regulators:  
The industry is its own worst threat.**

### NOFF Recommendation 2

**In answer to most if not all Questions, and to manage these risks, NOFF recommends immediate implementation of all recommendations of the Finfish Enquiry, with the addition of quantifiable objectives and target dates where these are not already specified.**

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<sup>9</sup> [https://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/ctee/Council/GovAdminA\\_Fin.html](https://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/ctee/Council/GovAdminA_Fin.html) submission 41.

The four principles the Government has established for the 10-Year Plan are flawed:

**1. *There will be no net increase in leased farming areas in Tasmanian waters***

- The Government Response document states ‘total *leasable area*’ [our emphasis], which is not the same as ‘leased farming areas’. It is significantly more extensive. Government maps previously made available to NOFF<sup>10</sup> indicate that ‘leasable areas’ includes many sections of the Tasmanian coastline not currently leased<sup>11</sup>.
- Does this mean that salmon biomass will increase even if leased areas do not?

We are deeply suspicious of this loophole.

**2. *Innovation – future growth lies in land-based and offshore salmon farming***

- For sound and effective management of any business, ‘innovation’ needs to be defined as ‘significant change’. Continuous improvement or adaptive management is not innovation.
- Does the word ‘future’ mean that existing inshore leases will remain as is, with only *future* expansion land-based or offshore?
- ‘Offshore’ is not defined.
- Is the industry merely selling salmon, or developing and managing other forms of aquaculture? What about product and market diversification?

We discuss innovation further in section 40.

**3. *World-best practice through continuous improvement***

- What is ‘world-best practice’, and who defines it? The phrase is too often loosely used by industry and Government to defend operations that regularly exhibit flaws and breaches, even of industry-defined and self-audited standards. A recent comprehensive, rigorous investigation<sup>12</sup> showed that Australian companies advertised compliance with international ASC standards, although only some of their leases were covered, and some of those had been audited as non-compliant, with no apparent remediation. This is called ‘cherry-picking’. We have no confidence in an over-used phrase unsupported by independent evidence or observed experience.
- If this principle is aspirational rather than descriptive of current operations, does it then confirm that present operations are indeed not good enough?

**4. *Strict independent regulation***

- This is vital, but needs clear definition. The Government’s response to the Finfish Enquiry report does not go nearly far enough. Yes, the EPA is now a statutory corporation, but its resources, even with recent additions, are totally inadequate. Its performance is untested, and based on its history, is not promising. What happens if the industry doubles in size, especially geographically and into Federal waters?

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<sup>10</sup> <https://neighboursoffishfarming.org.au/> - scroll down, or search the page for ‘Existence of secret maps confirmed’.

<sup>11</sup> TAMP press release, 23 April 2021

<sup>12</sup> *Global Review of the Aquaculture Stewardship Council’s Salmon Standard*. Seachoice, 2018. Viewed online at <https://www.seachoice.org/asc-global-review/>, August 2022.

- Past performance by industry and regulators is widely seen as totally unsatisfactory, even given the present inadequate standards. Independent regulation requires independent standards-setting and auditing, and proper enforcement, with no cherry-picking of the leases to be covered or audited.

### NOFF Recommendation 3

**In answer to Questions 1-3, NOFF recommends that the 10-Year Plan be based on the following principles, which can be applied to all aquaculture, present and future, land-based or at sea, regardless of product:**

- 1. It must do no harm**
- 2. It must be safe for consumers, wildlife and fish stocks, neighbouring communities, and fish farm staff**
- 3. It must be carbon neutral**
- 4. There must be complete transparency**
- 5. There must be a fair return to the community (Federal, State and Local Government) for use of Federal and State waterways, and the use of fresh water and other assets**
- 6. It must acknowledge and respect the connection, rights and aspirations of traditional custodians on country, including sea country**

It would then be the responsibility of those managing operations and proposing change to decide how best to satisfy these principles. If any proposal or operation fails to meet any one of these principles, it should cease or not proceed. It would not be up to Government, for example, to decide if a solution should be land-based or deep sea.

This approach is clear, simple and effective:

- It solves problems at their source, rather than attempting to fix individual issues as they arise.
- It encourages the industry to diversify its operations and product range.
- It facilitates integrated management where adaptive management has clearly failed.
- It encourages and enables implementation of the FAO's Strategic Development Goals.

### a. Impact on local communities

NOFF's membership is drawn from the region in Tasmania with the largest concentration of aquaculture—specifically salmon farming. Most of our members live in communities that existed long before the intrusion of salmon farms. The issues most frequently raised with us include:

- Industrial noise and lights, operating 24/7, and the damage to community health
- Visible pollution in the form of algae and slime, and the impact of this on recreational fishing and boating
- Animal welfare, specifically seals, dolphins, birds, and the salmon fish stocks.
- The adverse impact on the tourism and hospitality industries, which are far more important to Tasmania than salmon farming<sup>13</sup>
- Marine debris, onshore and afloat.

The Government's response to recommendation 3 of the Finfish Enquiry is unacceptable, especially given that the recommendation specifies no urgency or target dates, and only recommends planning, not action. The lack of definition of 'sensitive, sheltered and biodiverse areas' is not acceptable.

#### NOFF Recommendation 4

**In answer to Questions 2 - 3, 5, 8 - 9, and 17 - 18, NOFF recommends that the 10-year plan include a requirement for the industry to urgently move out of all inshore waters, including Storm Bay and Bass Strait, within five years. And that any leases within five km of seagrass and kelp beds be immediately fallowed pending removal or re-purposing. NOFF considers land-based closed-loop systems are the only prudent and acceptable solution.**

### b. Innovation

In section 3, we mentioned innovation as a principle for planning. Here we discuss the nature of innovation itself.

Thirty years ago, the local industry began with smolt produced in land-based facilities, then matured for sale in floating open feed-lot pens. **Nothing has changed.**

While there has been steady incremental change in processes and equipment, expected in *any* business, incremental change is *not* innovation. Nor is continuous improvement, or adaptive management.

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<sup>13</sup> *Making mountains out of minnows - Salmon in the Tasmanian economy*. The Australia Institute, 2019. Viewed online at <https://australianinstitute.org.au/report/making-mountains-out-of-minnows-salmon-in-the-tasmanian-economy/>, August 2022.

The industry is, by any reasonable measure, far from innovative, and on past performance is reluctant to pursue anything except short-term profit. This is only likely to increase now that it is about to be completely overseas-owned by corporations with poor track records and no real commitment to local community<sup>14 15</sup>.

While the Discussion Paper rightly invites comment on genuinely innovative change including land-based facilities and those further offshore, the industry in Tasmania has been reluctant to seriously investigate these or any other possibilities. There are many options, including but certainly not limited to:

- Increasing product differentiation by changing from an exotic species (Atlantic salmon) to unique Australian products<sup>16</sup>.
- Significantly changing the production model to totally self-contained onshore RAS facilities.
- Diversifying product and maintaining employment, by repurposing (or reverting) leases to shellfish production, or repurposing leases to polyculture<sup>17 18</sup> (vertical farming) producing a variety of **local** fish, shellfish and seaweed products. Polyculture is not the only option, but it warrants serious attention, as it is cheap to implement and operate, flexible in size, location and product, preserves and increases employment with its supply chain model and lease assets. Not least of all, it aligns with the principles we recommend in section 3.

**Polyculture and repurposing would also minimise or avoid any lease buyout imposition on Government.**

#### NOFF Recommendation 5

**In answer to Questions 4, and 15 - 19, NOFF recommends that:**

- **Government support for innovation and research encourage only activities requiring quantifiable operational improvement of at least 30%.**
- **Government support and research be directed to diversifying product and production models which satisfy the principles recommended in section 3.**
- **Government support and research be directed to activities supporting diversified product, diversified employment, and protecting 'Brand Tasmania'.**

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<sup>14</sup> *From bribes to your barbecue: How Australia's biggest meat company was built on corruption.* ABC News, 25 April 2022, viewed online at <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-04-25/jbs-meat-company-australia-four-corners-investigation/100997044>, August 2022.

<sup>15</sup> *Dossier on Cooke Aquaculture by Pulitzer-Prizewinning Journalists.* Tasmanian Times, August 20, 2022. Viewed online at <https://tasmaniantimes.com/2022/08/dossier-on-cooke-aquaculture-by-pulitzer-prizewinning-journalists/>, August 2022.

<sup>16</sup> Demand for Murray Cod inspires irrigators to diversify into aquaculture. ABC Rural, 7 Aug 2014, viewed online at <https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2014-08-07/farming-murray-cod-0708/5654694> August 2022.

<sup>17</sup> For example, see <https://www.greenwave.org/>, viewed August 2022.

<sup>18</sup> For example, see <https://bioneers.org/bren-smiths-open-sourced-3d-ocean-farm-model-can-feed-hungry-planet-ztvz1709/> viewed online August 2022.

### c. First Nations involvement

It is disturbing that this question is even included in the Discussion Paper. It is disingenuous at best. While there are First Nations people and communities in our region, NOFF claims no licence whatsoever to speak on their behalf on this issue. The answer is to ask them.

What we can say on advice from our contacts with First Nations peoples affected by aquaculture in Canada and Latin America, is that attempts to exploit differences between and within First Nations groups— as is too often done in Australia by mining companies—are disrespectful, divisive and, long-term, do not work. Similarly, attempts to buy support by offers of short-term employment will also fail. Based on their direct experiences, our overseas contacts advise that engagement with First Nations peoples should include all groups in Tasmania, not just some of those in any specific area.

#### NOFF Recommendation 6

**In answer to Question 10, NOFF recommends that Government engage directly with all First Nations communities and groups across Tasmania, in ways that avoid any suspicion of cherry-picking or bribery with offers of local employment. Ask them, not us.**

### d. Transparency and foreign ownership

Since the days of “the Hydro,”<sup>19</sup> Tasmania has a long history of deception, and state capture. A recent analysis quotes the World Bank definition of ‘state capture’ as *the exercise of power by private actors to ... shape policies or implementation in service of their narrow interests*. The report says: *State capture occurs when powerful or wealthy interests interfere with decision-making, or have access to decision-makers beyond that of ordinary citizens, and assume a degree of control over the rule-making process itself*<sup>20</sup>.

State capture has been particularly evident in our forestry and related industries<sup>21</sup>, gaming<sup>22</sup>, and now in salmon farming<sup>23</sup>.

This is exacerbated by the introduction of total foreign ownership. At least companies on the Australian Stock Exchange are required to reveal basic financial information, and to have proper risk management in place. Once ASX membership is gone from the entire industry when Tassal takeover is finalised, there will be no transparency at all.

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<sup>19</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hydro\\_Tasmania](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hydro_Tasmania) viewed online August 2022.

<sup>20</sup> Australian Democracy Network: *Confronting state capture*, February 2022, page 10. Downloaded from <https://australiandemocracy.org.au/statecapture>, August 2022.

<sup>21</sup> *Bureaucrats pushed for Swift parrot recovery plan to be changed to play down threat*. The Guardian, 25 August 2022, viewed online at <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/aug/25/swift-parrot-recovery-plan-changes-downplay-logging-threat-experts-say>, August 2022.

<sup>22</sup> *Cashing in: the gambling industry writes the rules and sways Tasmania's elections*. The Guardian, 9 Nov 2021, viewed online at <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/nov/09/cashing-in-the-gambling-industry-writes-the-rules-and-sways-tasmanias-elections>, August 2022.

<sup>23</sup> For example, *Flanagan's anti-salmon push growing, as EPA emails to Tassal revealed*. ABC News 29 April 2021, viewed online at [https://amp.abc.net.au/article/100103164?\\_twitter\\_impression=true](https://amp.abc.net.au/article/100103164?_twitter_impression=true), August 2022.

Clearly, local community acceptance and world-wide market acceptance would be improved by demonstrable, strong and independent standards, significantly increased Government and industry transparency, strong, independent and well-resourced regulation, and enforcement that actually passes the pub test <sup>24</sup>.

#### NOFF Recommendation 7

**In answer to Questions 6 and 7, NOFF recommends:**

- **Full implementation of all Finfish Enquiry recommendations relating to the recording and availability of information about the industry, its operations, and impacts, and the development and implementation of Government policy and regulations.**
- **Full implementation of all recommendations about standards, regulation and enforcement, including adequate resourcing.**

**To this we add that the need for demonstrable independence applies to all aspects, including developing and setting standards, scheduling and hosting auditing, and inspections. All this should be funded by industry levies, and the industry should play no role other than that.**

#### e. Employment

We have covered employment affected by the risks identified in section 2, and as it relates to innovation in section 40.

Although direct industry employment at State level is less than 1% of total State employment <sup>25</sup>, it is a matter of concern to our communities in remote coastal areas where salmon industry employment is indeed a major contributor.

As mentioned earlier, we support the Plan's inclusion of skills training, but this will be of little use if it is limited to salmon farming alone, especially if growth falters. This can be mitigated by broadening the scope of the Plan, to include a diversified range of products—as mentioned with vertical aquaculture and land-based systems— and hence employment opportunities and skills. This in turn will increase employment and resilience.

We refer you to NOFF's recommendations in sections 2 and 40.

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<sup>24</sup> *Huon Aquaculture gets a (very minor) slap on the wrist for breaking environmental protection Rules*. NOFF Press release, viewed online at <https://neighboursoffishfarming.org.au/resources/>, August 2022. This does not include information on EPA inactivity on many other incidents.

<sup>25</sup> ABS statistics, quoted in *Making mountains out of minnows - Salmon in the Tasmanian economy*. The Australia Institute, 2019. Viewed online at <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/making-mountains-out-of-minnows-salmon-in-the-tasmanian-economy/>, August 2022.

## f. Financial returns

Overall, the Discussion Paper summarises the financial returns situation adequately, although the first paragraph under the heading ‘Cost Recovery’ fails to point out that the Government is significantly subsidising the industry:

*Over 5 years, \$3.8 billion worth of fish were sold, but just \$64 million tax paid, while \$9.3 million in subsidies were received in two years. Changing generous leasing arrangements to the Norwegian model could raise \$2 billion for community development.<sup>26</sup>*

This well-documented report from the Australia Institute further states:

*The salmon industry does not pay council rates on its marine leases, putting it at an advantage compared to land-based industries. When councils considered charging rates on marine leases, the Tasmanian parliament legislated to remove that power from them . . . Annual lease and licence fees are paid to the State Government, of approximately \$923,000 for the entire industry. This represents 0.1% (one-thousandth) of the total farmgate production of the salmon industry in Tasmania, and 0.02% of total state revenue. Changing the current licensing regime to one similar to the Norwegian system could return between \$707 million and \$2 billion at government auction.*

It would be easy for the Government to research the costs applied to salmon industries in comparable countries (Scotland, Canada, New Zealand) and to implement a model much fairer and profitable to Tasmanians. Now that all industry profits will be going overseas, there is even less reason to continue to subsidise and undercharge the industry’s operations in our local waterways— including charges for leases, and for the gross exploitation of our freshwater resources.

We also point out that implementation of Recommendation 3 would prevent the degradation of property values and hence local council rates income, and protect Government returns from the tourism and hospitality sectors (see section 4a).

### NOFF Recommendation 8

**NOFF therefore recommends the immediate implementation of Finfish Enquiry recommendations 40 and 41, including charges for leases and the exploitation of our freshwater resources.**

## g. Other issues

As stated in our introduction, we see no purpose in analysing these and other issues and aspects in detail, when the Finfish Enquiry has done so comprehensively and effectively. The answers to all the questions set out in the Discussion Paper are in the Enquiry Report, explicitly or implicitly, and are also covered by the Principles we propose in section 3.

Apply the principles and the next steps required will be obvious.

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<sup>26</sup> *Making mountains out of minnows - Salmon in the Tasmanian economy.* The Australia Institute, 2019. Viewed online at <https://australianinstitute.org.au/report/making-mountains-out-of-minnows-salmon-in-the-tasmanian-economy/>, August 2022.