OPEN LETTER: GLOBALG.A.P. MUST IMMEDIATELY STOP CERTIFYING EXTINCTION

To the members of the GLOBALG.A.P. Advisory Board

25th July, 2023

Re: The urgent need for FoodPLUS GmbH to revoke GLOBALG.A.P. certification from Macquarie Harbour fish farms

Dear Members of the Board,

We call on you to immediately revoke the GLOBALG.A.P. certification from farmed salmon and ocean trout raised in Macquarie Harbour, Tasmania.

We make this request in light of new scientific evidence that identifies salmon farming in Macquarie Harbour as a key human activity significantly impacting the harbour’s environmental health and contributing to the decline of the endangered Maugean skate – a relic from Gondwana that is considered possibly the rarest skate species in the world.

Macquarie Harbour on the west coast of Tasmania has been confirmed to be the last remaining habitat for the endangered Maugean skate. One third of the harbour is located within the boundaries of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area; with the Maugean skate listed as one of the World Heritage Area’s values.

The endangered Maugean skate also shares its habitat with salmon and ocean trout farms certified by the GLOBALG.A.P. scheme.

A recent Institute of Marine and Antarctic Studies report found the Maugean skate population has rapidly declined by nearly half (47%) from 2014 to 2021. The authors state that decline is likely to have “significant implications” for the population status of the skate, with any further reduction in numbers “increasing their risk of extinction”. The Threatened Species Scientific Committee, which advises the federal government on endangered species, has proposed the Maugean skate be prioritized for assessment as “Critically Endangered”.¹

¹ Moreno and Semmens (2023) Interim report - Macquarie Harbour Maugean skate population status and monitoring. IMAS. Available at: https://imas.utas.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/1655611/Maugean-skate-2021-interim-report-FINAL.pdf
The report attributes the skate’s decline to degraded environmental conditions in the harbour, particularly dissolved oxygen (DO) levels, caused by anthropogenic inputs, namely the expansion of salmon aquaculture industry:

“The unique hydrology of Macquarie Harbour results in a naturally challenging habitat. While anthropogenic activities since European colonisation have long impacted the harbour, in the past 15 years altered river flows (growing reliance on hydroelectric generation and production demand) and large-scale development of salmonid aquaculture have resulted in considerable changes to the environment.

The Maugean skate has been shown to have behavioural and physiological mechanisms that allow it to survive in the challenging conditions of Macquarie Harbour. However, recent changes to the environment (particularly DO levels and mixing dynamics) mean that high impact environmental events have increased in duration, magnitude, and frequency (e.g., duration and severity of low DO periods). Likewise, there is an increased potential for overlap of multiple stressors that may have compounding effects (DO, salinity, temperature)...

Accordingly, it is apparent that the species is already being pushed beyond their adaptive threshold. This highlights one of the unique challenges of managing micro-endemic, hyper-specialised species, which is that the viability of the species is intrinsically linked to the health of their restricted habitat. Therefore, in the case of the Maugean skate, the ongoing impacts to DO levels and mixing dynamics are of extreme concern to the persistence of the species.” [emphasis added]

Alarmingly, the evidence suggests the Maugean Skate is only one environmental event away from extinction, with IMAS researcher Professor Jayson Semmens stating, “The environmental changes in the harbour have increased the skate’s vulnerability to sudden high-impact events, such as water column turn-over driven by westerly winds, which can happen at any moment and potentially decimate the population”.

The findings have prompted scientists to take the unprecedented step of calling for urgent conservation action to save this species from extinction – including taking immediate action on salmon farming activities in the harbour.

Meanwhile, Huon Aquaculture's Macquarie Harbour farms are GLOBALG.A.P. certified as being "environmentally responsible" and being sold to unsuspecting shoppers as “sustainably sourced”.

Huon appears to be using their in-house “ethically and sustainably sourced” label on Macquarie Harbour products that are GLOBALG.A.P. certified. From a consumer perspective, the “sustainably sourced” claim on GLOBALG.A.P. certified Macquarie Harbour salmon and trout can be viewed as entirely misleading.

According to the GLOBALG.A.P. website, the scheme’s vision includes “safe, socially and environmentally responsible farming practices” and “safeguarding our environment”. GLOBALG.A.P. certified Macquarie Harbour farms are failing to meet this vision. Instead, they are associated with waste inputs that have caused low dissolved oxygen, habitat degradation, and contributed to the decline in population of the endangered Maugean skate.

It’s worth noting that the RSPCA farming scheme also certifies Huon Aquaculture products – except those from Macquarie Harbour. Unlike GLOBALG.A.P., the RSPCA Farmed Atlantic Salmon standard disallows Macquarie Harbour farms due to the “environmental conditions within the harbour”.

Given the new evidence that the rapid decline of the endangered Maugean skate is associated with salmon and trout aquaculture operations in Macquarie Harbour, we contend the certification of Macquarie Harbour farms places the GLOBALG.A.P. scheme’s credibility at risk.

Simply put, greenwashing the extinction of the Maugean skate is not “environmentally responsible”.

We strongly urge the FoodPLUS GmbH to immediately revoke its GLOBALG.A.P. certification from all Macquarie Harbour fish farms.

Sincerely,

Kelly Roebuck
SeaChoice representative, Living Oceans

Jessica Coughlan
Neighbours of Fish Farming

On behalf of the following signatories:

Glenys Oogies, Chief Executive Officer, Animals Australia, Australia

Marcela Ramos, Member, Asamblea de Mujeres Insulares por las Aguas, Chile

Eloise Carr, Director, The Australian Institute Tasmania, Australia

Katrina Love, State Convenor, Animal Justice Party Tasmania, Australia

Darren Kindleysides, CEO, Australian Marine Conservation Society, Australia

Dr. Tarsicio Antezana J, President, Asociación Para la Defensa del Ambiente y la Cultura de Chiloé, Chile

Georgia Hancock, Director and Senior Attorney, Marine Life Program, Animal Welfare Institute, USA

Alistair Allan, Antarctic and Marine Campaigner, Bob Brown Foundation, Australia

Haans Siver, Australian Director, Captain Paul Watson Foundation, Australia

Catherine Collins, Author, Salmon Wars, Canada
Sue Waters, Campaign and Content Consultant, Global Salmon Farming Resistance, Canada

Catalina Cendoya, Coordinator, Global Salmon Farming Resistance, Argentina

GrassRoots Action Network Tasmania, Australia

Ruben Oddekalv, Leader, Green Warriors of Norway, Norway

Sarah King, Head of Oceans and Plastics Campaign, Greenpeace, Canada

Erica Martin, CEO, Humane Society International, Australia

Jón Kaldal, Icelandic Wildlife Fund, Iceland

Johan Flyvbjerg, Founder, Ingen burfisk i havet, Denmark

Mark J. Palmer, Associate Director, International Marine Mammal Project of Earth Island Institute, USA

Eva Douzinas, Co-founder, Katheti AMKE, Greece
Gerard Castles, Killora Community Association, Australia

Fay Orfanidou, Co-founder, Director, Katheti AMKE, Greece

Karen Wristen, Executive Director, Living Oceans Society, Canada

Dr. Cornelia E. Nauen, President, Mundus maris asbl, Belgium

Mark Sherwood, Executive Director, Native Fish Society, USA

Carly Madge, Policy and Campaign Manager, Ocean Conservation and MPAs, Nature Canada, Canada

Peter George, President, Neighbours of Fish Farms, Australia

Elvar Örn Fridriksson, Program Director, North Atlantic Salmon Fund, Iceland

Cassandra Wright, Treasurer, NWTAS for Clean Oceans INC, Australia

Natalie Parra, Campaign Director, Oceanic Preservation Society, USA
Gloria Hidalga, Co-founder, Océanos de Vida Libre, Spain

Macarena Sanchez, Patagonia, Chile

Dr. Sandra Altherr, Co-founder, Pro Wildlife, Germany

Patti Schaefer, Managing Director, Rauch Foundation, USA

Sandy Stewart, Director, Rob Stewart Sharkwater Foundation, Canada

Michael Long, Head of Operations, Parley, USA

Brock Callen, Founder, Planet Oceans, USA

Crystal Canney, Executive Director, Protect Maine’s Fishing Heritage Foundation, USA

Richard Flanagan, Author, Australia

Dr. Lisa Gershwin, Research Scientist, Salmon Reform Alliance, Australia
John Murphy, Chairperson, Salmon Watch Ireland, Ireland

Kelly Roebuck, Representative, SeaChoice, Canada

Brendon Sing, Co-Founder, Shark Guardian, UK

Fernando Reis, Executive Director, Sharks Educational Institute, Portugal

Mick Lawrence, President, Surfrider Tasmania, Australia

Jeff Hansen, Managing Director, Sea Shepherd, Australia

Marie-Celine Piednoir, Associate Director - Partnerships and Communities, SeaLegacy, USA

Dr Iris Ziegler, Head International Cooperation, Sharkproject International, Germany

Julia Sorochan, Assistant Director, SkeenaWild Conservation Trust, Canada

Dani Casado, Director, Tanana Pictures, Chile
Trish Bailey, Vice Chair, Tasmanian Alliance for Marine Protection, Australia

Peter McGlone, CEO, Tasmanian Conservation Trust, Australia

James Kirkpatrick, Chair, Tasmanian Independent Science Council, Australia

Brian Stewart, President, United Conservationists Inc., USA

Benedikta Guðrún Svavarsdottir, VÁ! félag um vernd fjærðar, Iceland

Stan Proboszcz, Senior Scientist, Watershed Watch Salmon Society, Canada

Emma Helverson, Executive Director, Wild Fish Conservancy, USA

Tom Allen, Campaign Manager, Wilderness Society Tasmania, Australia

Rachel Mulrenan, Scotland Director, WildFish, Scotland

Ben Pearson, Country Director, World Animal Protection, Australia