

Salmon Mortality Event: D'Entrecasteaux Channel

Questions and Answers

This information sheet provides Questions and Answers relating to the salmon mortality event that has occurred in Tasmania's D'Entrecasteaux Channel.

It is for members of the community seeking information about the nature and management of the event.

Question: What is the material washing up on some Southern Tasmanian beaches and shorelines?

The material is fatty fish material.

Question: Is the fatty fish material harmful?

No, it is not harmful to humans. The presence of fatty fish material on beaches, while unpleasant and smelly, will not harm health. A naturally occurring bacterium that does not cause human disease is the main reason for the fish dying.

The Department of Health advises that people should not handle or consume the fish material and avoid activities that will bring you into contact with it. This same advice applies to any other dead animal parts in the natural environment. Leaving such material alone eliminates any risk.

If you do make contact with the material, wash it off with soap and water.

Question: Will my dog get sick if they eat any of the fatty fish material that has washed up on a beach?

No. The fatty fish material poses no risk to humans or domestic animals.

Question: Why have the salmon in the D'Entrecasteaux Channel died?

Salmon like cold water. Every summer as the marine water warms up it is not unusual for salmon producers to experience some mortalities. This year the warmer waters and a bacteria called *P. salmonis* that affects salmon health has resulted in an unprecedented mortality event.

Question: What is *P. salmonis*?

P. salmonis is the shortened name for *Piscirickettsia salmonis*.

P. salmonis is a bacterium that causes piscirickettsiosis disease in salmon. The Chief Veterinary Officer has published an Information Sheet on *P. salmonis* to assist the community to understand the disease.

More Information can be found in the [P. salmonis fact sheet](#).

Question: How is the P. salmonis bacteria managed?

The P. salmonis bacteria is managed by salmon producers through vaccination and medication as required.

The Tasmanian salmonid industry, with support from Government and the Fisheries Research Development Corporation, has invested heavily in research to develop a vaccine against this disease.

The Tasmanian government has developed a vaccine for the P. salmonis bacteria at its Centre for Aquatic Animal Health and Vaccines Mt Pleasant laboratories. The vaccine was first used in 2023, but only in the east coast marine farming zone.

The vaccine protects Atlantic salmon against a number of bacteria, including P. salmonis and is expected to assist the Tasmanian salmon producers in mitigating against the immediate threat posed by P. salmonis.

Medications such as antibiotics to treat fish health are not used often. In the rare event that fish in marine farms require treatment, companies must advise the Environment Protection Authority Director and the Chief Veterinary Officer before the treatment is applied.

The dose rates and treatment times for administering medications to the salmon are carefully managed to avoid residues. Following the administration of the medication fish cannot be harvested for a specific period of time.

This is a legal requirement. More information on the use of medication such as antibiotics in marine farms can be found here: [Management of Therapeutants](#).

The biosecurity standards for the Tasmanian Salmonid Industry ensures marine farms also carefully control the movement of their equipment and fish between marine farming zones to assist in the management of the bacteria.

Question: Is P. salmonis bacteria harmful to humans?

No. It is a naturally occurring bacteria that only affects salmon. The bacterium is of no risk to humans and other warm-blooded animals.

The bacteria is not a reportable disease under the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) and it is not on the Tasmanian exotic and emergency list.

Question: Is the salmon safe to consume?

Salmon harvested for human consumption must meet all the usual food safety requirements. Fish that have died from the disease are not harvested for human consumption.

Question: Is the bacteria in other marine farming areas in Tasmania?

Yes. The bacteria P. salmonis is present in other marine farming in areas. The bacteria has been confirmed to present in 2024 in the east coast salmonid marine biosecurity zone since 2021 and in the south east salmonid marine biosecurity zone since 2023.

Question: Can *P. salmonis* bacteria affect other fish or marine animals affected?

No. *P. salmonis* is a bacteria that affects saltwater salmonoids.

The bacteria does not survive in the water above 25 Degrees Celsius and it poses no known risk to native freshwater fish.

The bacteria is also not known to pose a threat to other marine (saltwater) species.

Question: Is the *P. salmonis* the same as the strain of *P. salmonis* found in Chile.

No. It is not the same strain as present in Chile.