

Michael Lawrence

Surfing Tasmania Inc

Surfing Tasmania Inc. Submission to:
The Department of Natural Resources
and Environment Tasmania on
Draft Aquaculture Standards

Surfing Tasmania Inc. is not opposed to salmon farming in principle, but is opposed to how it is currently conducted and wishes to draw your attention to submissions by the Environmental Defenders Office and by the Tasmanian Independent Science Council on the department's Draft Aquaculture Standards.

After careful consideration, STAS Inc. wishes to endorse and adopt those submissions as relevant, incisive and authoritative as applied to aquaculture in the state in its current form. We also advise that STAS Inc is affiliated with the Tasmanian Alliance for Marine Protection (TAMP) and supports the Dennes Point Declaration which calls for the removal of the salmon industry's feedlots from Tasmanian and oceanic waters, transitioning to land-based salmon production. Please include Surfing Tasmania Inc. as a responder to the Draft Aquaculture Standards review.

Background

First established in 1963, Surfing Tasmania Inc. is recognised by the State Government as a State Sporting Organisation (SSO). It represents the interests of surfers around the state and is a stakeholder of the national body, Surfing Australia Inc.

It's estimated that there are some 10,000 recreational surfers in Tasmania and the sport is undertaken around the entire coastline and offshore islands. During the summer months visitation by large numbers of travelling surfers from around Australia and overseas is apparent and are attracted by the state brand of 'Clean/Green'. This can be short term by air to the Tasmanian ports, but also direct from Melbourne to King and Flinders Island. Others come via sea with their own vehicles and usually stay longer term. Martha Lavinia on King Island and Shipstern Bluff on the Tasman Peninsula being acknowledged as world class surf destinations.

Red Bull have an ongoing commitment for the International Cape Fear contest at Shipstern Bluff with contestants drawn from around the globe. Now in it's second year with a further contest projected for 2023, the event is broadcast live around the globe through streaming platforms to an audience of several million.

Roaring Beach Nubeena has been the venue for the Australian Junior National Surf Titles and Marawah was the location for two international Cold Water Classic surf events and one Red Bull Wave Sailing event over the past fifteen year and is the location of the West Coast Classic, the longest continuous surf contest in Australia.

No study has been undertaken to estimate the tourist value of surfing to the State, but given the

number of national and international surfers travelling here for months at a time, it must be quite substantial.

Unlike other sports that require substantial investment in infrastructure – think ovals, stadiums, swimming pools - surfing is unique in the sense that it makes little, if any, demand on government funding. It merely depends upon natural elements: swell, offshore winds and beaches.

Neither is it confined to defined locations. Surfers think nothing of travelling vast distances around the state to pursue waves and their spend on equipment, transport, fuel, food and accommodation is both substantial and spread around the entire state.

The sport is multi generational with many elders in their sixties sharing waves with kids as young as six.

Surfing Tasmania supports statewide learn to surf programs, conducts competitions and creates pathways for those wishing to compete, judge, coach or administer the sport.

It also works with affiliated organisations dedicated to ensuring the environmental health of our coastlines and coastal waters, as well as protecting surfers rights and interests. Surveys show that the environment rates as a major concern for 75%* of our members and our involvement with environmental issues dates back to the early 1980's.

*Reference: 2021 STAS Survey of surfing in Tasmania. Powered by Survey Monkey.

Of significant concern to our members is the major expansion in salmon farming over the past thirty years. While the industry claims to be open, transparent and have the interests of stakeholders in mind, our experience is to the contrary. Despite being a stakeholder, as an organisation we only found out about the expansion of fish farms into 'deep water' – Storm Bay, Okehampton and Bass Strait – via the media.

Our specific concerns relate to our collective experience dating back to the sport's beginnings in the late 1950's and are as follows:

1. Shark encounters

As a stakeholder we believe the industry has a duty of care towards risk management between surfers and White Pointer sharks attracted by fish farming.

Salmon farms have been established since the mid 1980's close to surf locations that have been in use since the late 1950's.

Accordingly we request the industry release what research has been undertaken and what mitigation measures are in place as part of this duty of care. e.g. What protocols are in place and how are stakeholders advised.

History

In Tasmania there have been eleven attacks from 1803 to 2010 - five of them being fatal. There has also been seventy seven White Pointer shark captures since 1958.

Since the first salmon farms were introduced to Tasmanian waters in the early 1980's there have been seven shark attacks: four, or 57% of those, have been on surfers, all were non fatal – one at Shelly Point, Scamander in 1989, one at Binalong Bay in 2009, one at South Cape Bay in 2012 and one at Clifton Beach in 2016.

Source: White Pointer South; www.sharkattackdata.com/place/australia/tasmania

While surfers' encounters with sharks have been rare up to the mid 1980's, there has been a pattern of increased sightings since then. It could be argued that this is due to the statewide increase in popularity in surfing as a sport, however anecdotally over the past ten years sightings have increased dramatically, particularly at the Narrows, Marion Bay; around Orford on the east coast; around Roaring Beach, Nubeena and on the South Arm peninsula.

Rather than the occasional sighting of years previous, three or four sightings per year at each of the above mentioned locations are now common. Interestingly the increase in sightings has coincided with the establishment of the Storm Bay, Nubeena, Port Arthur and Okehampton fish farms.

At the same time there has also been a major increase in reports/sightings in seal populations in those areas by both fishers and surfers. The major predator of seals are White Pointer sharks and logically any increase in seal populations will see an increase in White Pointer shark activity.

This is also confirmed by farm managers, divers and fishers in recent publications White Pointer South and Toxic.

Monthly seal deterrent usage figures for the period January 2021 to March 2022 show seal crackers were used 8,057 times by Huon Aquaculture — the most of three major salmon farmers in Tasmania. Petuna used the tactic 1,748 times in the period, while Tassal used crackers 2,259 times.

Source:... www.abc.net.au/news/2022-05-09/salmon-company-deterred-seals-with-underwater-explosion

2. Affects of fish farm leases on Swell patterns in Storm Bay.

Given the extent of the proposed TASSAL lease west of Wedge Island and the Petuna lease south of Betsey Island, Surfing Tasmania Inc. requests that details of what modelling has been undertaken by the industry be released to explain what affect the leases will have on the swell patterns moving through Storm Bay.

The integrity of traditional surf locations around the state is dependent upon swells being unimpeded. Obstructions like offshore islands, islets, kelp forests and man made structures like breakwaters and groynes will create swell refraction and reflections that have a major impact on the way swells interact with our coastlines. This includes how waves break and impact upon coastal erosion.

Offshore fish pens can be up to 250 metres in circumference, extend to a depth of some 40 metres and hold over 120,000 salmon. Since a lease can extend for several kilometres it is reasonable to assume that they will have a considerable affect on swell.

There are 35 surf locations in the south of the state dependant upon swells moving unimpeded out of the Southern Ocean via Storm Bay. They extend from Shipstern Bluff on the Tasman Peninsula north to Park/Carlton Beach, west to the South Arm Peninsula and further west to the Kingston Beach area. These locations have provided surf for Hobart and surrounding suburbs for over 60 years and represent the equivalent infrastructure of 'arenas, stadiums and swimming pools' for around 60% of Tasmania's surf population.

The quality and consistency of each of those surf spots is dependent upon a complex matrix of swell patterns, swell periods, tides and wind direction. Our knowledge and understanding of this matrix is the result of 60 years collective experience of generations of surfers which would now number in many thousands. Subtle differences in that matrix affect how, when and why various locations provide optimum conditions.

Our members have grave concerns as to what affect offshore fish farm leases will have upon this swell matrix.

3. Shark mitigation and swell refraction in Bass Strait

A similar situation exists on the northwest coast where under a proposed three-year trial, 50 hectares of Bass Strait, located about 6 nautical miles north of Burnie, will be set aside for fish farming with research conducted by the federally funded Blue Economy Cooperative Research Centre.

Surfing Tasmania Inc. requests details of what studies will be undertaken during this trial period in regards to both White Pointer shark research and mitigation measures along with what affects fish farming will have on swell patterns at local northwest coast surf locations.

Unlike Storm Bay where the swell window is confined to basically a southwest to southeast quadrant, in Bass Strait swell can come from: a west-northwest direction; north to a north east or east direction. Further, the depth of the Strait is much shallower - resulting in a greater variation in swell period. This results in a greater variance in how different direction swells and swell periods affect local surf spots and potentially coastal erosion.

4. Fish Farm Debris

Since the establishment of TASSAL operations at Badger Creek, Nubeena and fish pens in Parsons Bay, Nubeena, surfers have observed a massive increase in plastic debris originating from fish pens washing ashore at the Roaring Beach Conservation Area.

It is noted that the type of debris has primarily been plastic piping and rope. It is also noted that in recent times a colour coded system has been introduced enabling identification of the source along with a reporting system for both debris at sea and debris onshore.

Surfers have been at the fore in coastal cleanups, indeed one of the longest running coastal cleanups in the world, held annually in southwest Tasmania, was established by two of our members: crayfisherman, Dave Wyatt and marine biologist, Matt Dell.

Surfing Tasmania Inc. continues to promote a clean ocean policy through education programs on our

social media site and through our statewide boardrider clubs, however it is our observation that despite these measures, not only does the volume of traditional debris continue to increase but micro plastics is now becoming widespread.

Given the proposed expansion into Bass Strait we hold grave fears for surf locations on the coast, especially given that they are only in recent times, recovering from many years of degradation resulting from the dumping of industrial waste around the Burnie area.

Accordingly Surfing Tasmania Inc. suggests that the penalties applied to debris originating from fish farms in Tasmanian coastal waters need to be not only reviewed but dramatically increased.

Michael Lawrence
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