

# Submission: Draft Tasmanian Salmon Industry Plan

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*The Draft Tasmanian Salmon Industry Plan has been developed in the absence of a range of up-to-date Government policies and legislation. Relevant legislation is listed for near- and medium-term review and there is a complete absence of other key government policies. The Tasmanian Government continues to prioritise the interests of the industry over good governance, ecosystem health, and the prosperity of Tasmanian communities. It should instead follow the recommendations of the Parliamentary Inquiry into Fin Fish Farming and establish a new marine management framework, with which the Salmon Plan should be aligned.*

Submission

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January 2023

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The Australia Institute Tasmania acknowledges that Tasmania was taken forcibly and unethically, and that First Nations Tasmanians continue to suffer the consequences of this today. The Institute offers respect to First Nations Tasmanian Elders past and present. We stand for a future that recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sovereignty and respects and acknowledges their perspectives, culture, language and history.

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# Summary

The Australia Institute Tasmania welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on the Draft Tasmanian Salmon Industry Plan and associated Draft Workplan (referred to hereafter as the “Draft Plan” and “Workplan”, respectively).

We consider the Draft Plan to be an improvement on the previous Sustainable Industry Growth Plan for the Salmon Industry. However, to achieve the Tasmanian Government’s vision for a sustainable industry that all Tasmanians can be proud of, the Draft Plan requires significant further improvement.

Tasmanians want action to protect their coastal waters. The Australia Institute’s research shows that the vast majority of Tasmanians are concerned that the health of Tasmania’s coastal waters is declining, and more than half of Tasmanians also feel that the State Government is not doing enough to protect the health of the ocean.

The current regulatory regime that applies to the salmon industry has neither achieved its objectives nor met its obligations. There are multiple concerns about the industry, including:

- The eutrophication of inshore waters;
- The flow-on effects on ecosystems;
- The industry’s impact on protected and endangered native species;
- Poor habitat protection; and
- Lack of community returns and input into planning and management.

These concerns—alongside increasing pressure from climate change, other uses of the marine environment, and land-based pollution—all contribute to the increasing calls for a fundamental improvement to the management framework for Tasmanian coastal waters.

The Draft Workplan identifies four Priority Outcomes: a sustainable industry, healthy ecosystems, prosperous communities and contemporary governance. Good governance is essential to achieving the other Priority Outcomes, and the Australia Institute thus considers this should be the top Priority Outcome. It should certainly rank above industry sustainability.

This submission identifies several key considerations for the implementation of good governance, including recognition of First Nations rights, the absence of relevant Government policies, and resource sharing.

It has been 13 years since the last integrated assessment of ecosystem health by resource managers in Tasmania. This means that the 2009 Tasmanian State of the Environment Report—which includes information from that assessment—is now very out of date. The

result is that the Tasmanian Government is often flying blind, formulating policy on Tasmania's coastal waters without adequate information about what is happening in those waters. How can forward planning for fishing and maritime industries occur without up-to-date ecosystem condition information about the areas being considered?

Concerns about the salmon industry, and recommendations for reforms to address these concerns, were highlighted in the Final Report of the Parliamentary Inquiry into Fin Fish Farming in Tasmania (the "Parliamentary Inquiry"), which was published in May 2022. Similar concerns have been raised throughout numerous rounds of consultation on the development of the Draft Plan. This submission builds on previous research and submissions to the development process.

In its response to the Parliamentary Inquiry, the Tasmanian Government supported, or supported in principle, the majority of the Inquiry's recommendations. In doing so, it recognised the need for a major overhaul of the salmon industry. Unfortunately, the Draft Plan does not implement the Inquiry's recommendations adequately. It also fails to implement both the contents of the Government's own response to the Inquiry, and the principles for developing Tasmania's 10-Year Salmon Plan. A key example is the lack of any firm commitment to reduce or remove farms from sheltered, inshore waters, which was a recommendation of the Parliamentary Inquiry. While methods of implementing several other recommendations are included in the Draft Plan, many of these would benefit from more specific, time-bound commitments.

Neither the Draft Plan nor Workplan include an ongoing process for reviewing either final document. Contemporary governance frameworks include built-in requirements for monitoring and evaluation to ensure regular opportunities to update practices. Without such triggers, decades can pass without improvements being made. The current review of the *Living Marine Resource Management Act 1995* is a case in point. The final Plan and Workplan should include a regular review mechanism in the strategic pathways and actions associated with the Priority Outcome on Contemporary Governance.

Access to a healthy environment is a universal human right, upon which our own wellbeing depends. The value of Tasmania's globally significant marine biodiversity and endemism should not be underestimated, and its preservation should not be subsumed to the interests of industry.

The Australia Institute Tasmania recommends that:

1. To improve community engagement on the Draft Plan, the consultation period should be extended for a further month until 20 February 2023 to avoid the holiday period.
2. To achieve Tasmania's Resource Management and Planning System objectives, the Draft Plan outcomes should be reprioritised as 1. Contemporary governance, 2. Healthy ecosystems, 3. Prosperous communities, and 4. Sustainable industry.

3. There should be direct engagement with First Nations Tasmanians to ensure that appropriate recognition of Tasmanian Aboriginal rights are reflected in the Plan.
4. The four guiding principles for the development of the Plan should continue to be applied until all relevant policies have been updated or completed. In particular, there should be no further expansion of the industry until relevant policies have been updated or completed.
5. All of the recommendations in the Final Report of the Parliamentary Inquiry into Fin Fish Farming should be implemented. This should begin with the top recommendation, i.e. “that a revised Salmon Industry Growth Plan be developed as one aspect of an overarching Marine Plan for Tasmania”. The development of the Draft Plan should be paused to align it with broader marine planning for Tasmania.
6. Management of coastal waters should appropriately consider all uses and users, be evidence-based, and include up-to-date environmental, social and recreational values assessments (including an updated State of the Environment Report for Tasmania).
7. The final Plan should include a regular review mechanism in the strategic pathways and actions associated with the Priority Outcome on Contemporary Governance.
8. Resource sharing arrangements with regard to access to coastal waters should be spelt out clearly. Where one sector is favoured at the expense of another, compensation should be payable to the sector which loses resource access.
9. The final Plan should explicitly adopt a precautionary approach in the strategic pathways associated with the healthy ecosystems priority outcome and associated actions.
10. The Draft Plan should be amended to clarify the need for the development of broad marine policy settings, ahead of the use of marine spatial planning.
11. The final Plan should recognise and plan for the removal of fin fish farms from sensitive, sheltered inshore waters within specified timeframes.
12. An economic return should be paid to the community for the private use of public resources. This should be negotiated in advance of any new policy decision. This could be achieved through royalty payments, auctions of leases or other mechanisms.

# Introduction

Momentum is building globally and locally for the development of a more sustainable ocean economy. The decade 2021-2030 is the UN's Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, and the High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy—an international collaborative project of which Australia is one of 17 member countries—is working toward a future where effective protection, sustainable production and equitable prosperity go hand-in-hand. As part of this project, Australia has pledged to develop a Sustainable Ocean Plan by 2025.

The development of the new Tasmanian Salmon Industry Plan provides an important opportunity for the Tasmanian Government to adopt contemporary ocean management practices.

Tasmania has some of the highest levels of marine diversity and endemism in the world.<sup>1</sup> This is globally significant. Habitats supporting the rich variety of marine life include kelp forests, rocky reefs, seagrass beds, sponge gardens and open water, each with their own ecosystem of fish, seabirds, marine mammals and invertebrates.

The multiple uses of Tasmania's marine environment include commercial uses such as fishing, aquaculture, ports/shipping and emerging offshore industries, as well as a diverse range of cultural, tourism and recreational activities. All rely on healthy marine ecosystems.

The current regulatory regime that applies to the salmon industry has neither achieved its objectives or met its obligations. There are multiple concerns about the industry, including:

- The eutrophication of inshore waters;
- The flow-on effects on ecosystems;
- The industry's impact on protected and endangered native species;
- Poor habitat protection; and
- Lack of community returns and input into planning and management.

These factors—alongside increasing pressure from climate change, other uses of the marine environment, and land-based pollution—all call for a fundamental improvement to the management framework for salmon farming and holistic management of Tasmanian coastal waters.

The Australia Institute has a long record of contributing to marine policy discussion and development through research and engagement, including:

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<sup>1</sup> Edyvane, K. S. (2000) *Tasmanian Marine Protected Areas Strategy Background Report*, Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment



- [A sea of evidence to absorb](#)
- [Marine Roundtable: Towards a sustainable management framework for Tasmania](#)
- [Tasmanian Ocean Summit 2022](#)
- [Win for Tassie Environment as Government Agrees to State of Environment Report](#)
- [Response to Fin Fish Report Welcome, More Needed to Reel in Tassie Salmon Industry](#)
- [Submission: Towards a 10 year Salmon Plan](#)
- [Ocean Management in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century](#)
- [Time for a state-wide marine plan](#)
- [Tidal Wave of Alarm for Tassie Oceans Amid Landmark Marine Law Review: Research](#)
- [Review of Tasmania’s Living Marine Resource Management Act 1995](#)
- [Submission to Inquiry into the Australian aquaculture sector](#)
- [Polling: Majority of Tasmanians Want Pause of Tasmanian Salmon Farm Expansion](#)
- [Towards a sustainable marine management regime: An update on Tasmanian progress](#)
- [Tasmanians still missing out on revenue from fish farms](#)
- [Making mountains out of minnows: Salmon in the Tasmanian economy](#)
- [Submission: Fin Fish Farming in Tasmania Inquiry](#)
- [Salmon stakes: Risks for the Tasmanian salmon industry](#)
- Other research is available [here](#).

The Australia Institute Tasmania recently participated in:

- 2022 Tasmanian Salmon Symposium hosted by the Blue Economy Cooperative Research Centre;
- The Salmon Forum hosted by the Blue Economy Cooperative Research Centre; and
- Numerous Blue Economy Cooperative Research Centre webinars and online information sessions.

This submission responds to the draft Tasmanian Salmon Industry Plan and associated draft Workplan (the “Draft Plan” and “Workplan”). The Draft Plan is an improvement on the previous Sustainable Industry Growth Plan for the Salmon Industry. However, to achieve the Tasmanian Government’s vision—a sustainable industry of which all Tasmanians can be proud—the Draft Plan requires significant further improvement before being finalised.

# Consultation

The decision by various community and other organisations to boycott the consultation process is problematic for the Tasmanian Government. They are worried that recommendations from the Parliamentary Inquiry have not been adequately implemented and that concerns raised previously have not been adequately addressed in the Draft Plan. Inter alia, these concerns include:

- The expansion of the industry into inappropriate locations;
- Refusal to make time-bound commitments to remove farms from inappropriate locations in sheltered, inshore waters;
- Unresolved harmful interactions with seals and the endangered Morgean skate;
- Noise and light pollution; and
- The timing of this consultation process.

On the last point, The Australia Institute notes the current consultation period coincides with the busy end-of-year, Christmas and summer holiday period. This is unhelpful in seeking community engagement with the Draft Plan and also in improving public understanding of the salmon industry, both of which are aims that the Government is seeking to achieve.

Research conducted by the Australia Institute in 2021-22 found widespread community concern about the declining health of Tasmania's coastal waters, as well as a strong appetite for more Governmental action on the health of the state's oceans:<sup>2</sup>

- A strong majority of Tasmanians (64%) are concerned that the health of Tasmania's coastal waters is declining;
- More than one in two (56%) Tasmanians think the Tasmanian Government is not doing enough to protect the health of the state's oceans;
- 63% of Tasmanians agree that the expansion of salmon farms in Tasmania should be paused until industry standards are developed and current government inquiries and reviews into the industry have been completed;
- More than three in four (76%) voters in the division of Braddon, surveyed during the last Federal election, are concerned that Tasmania's ocean is under pressure from

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<sup>2</sup> The Australia Institute (2021) *Polling: Majority of Tasmanians Want Pause of Tasmanian Salmon Farm Expansion*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/post/polling-majority-of-tasmanians-want-pause-of-tasmanian-salmon-farm-expansion/>

climate change, pollution, and fishing. They support the Government taking action to make sure the ocean stays healthy for future generations.<sup>3</sup>

The clear community concern about Tasmania's oceans means that Tasmanians should be given every opportunity to contribute to the consultation process on the draft Plan.

**Recommendation 1:**

To improve community engagement on the Draft Plan, the consultation period should be extended for a further month until 20 February 2023 to avoid the holiday period.

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<sup>3</sup> The Australia Institute (2022) *Polling: Braddon voter during the 2022 Federal Election*:  
<https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/braddon-polling-march-2022/>

# Tasmania's Resource Management and Planning System

The Draft Plan contains no objectives. It also does not refer to the objectives of Tasmania's Resource Management and Planning System (RMPS).

Instead, the Draft Plan includes a vision statement, along with four priority outcomes and associated strategic pathways. While RMPS objectives are listed as a schedule in relevant Acts, the Salmon Plan could be improved by referring explicitly to these objectives, which are:

- To promote the sustainable development of natural and physical resources and the maintenance of ecological processes and genetic diversity;
- To provide for the fair, orderly and sustainable use and development of air, land and water;
- To encourage public involvement in resource management and planning;
- To facilitate economic development in accordance with the [previous] objectives; and
- To promote the sharing of responsibility for resource management and planning between the different spheres of government, the community and industry in [Tasmania].<sup>4</sup>

**Sustainable development** is defined in relevant legislation as managing the use, development, and protection of natural and physical resources in a way, or at a rate, that enables people and communities to provide for their social, economic and cultural wellbeing and for their health and safety, while also:

- Sustaining the potential of natural and physical resources to meet the reasonably foreseeable needs of future generations;
- Safeguarding the life-supporting capacity of air, water, soil and ecosystems; and

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<sup>4</sup> Environment Protection Authority (2022) The Resource Management and Planning System (RMPS), <https://epa.tas.gov.au/about-the-epa/policy-legislation-cooperative-arrangements/about-policy-and-legislation/the-rmps>

- Avoiding, remedying, or mitigating any adverse effects of activities on the environment.

The Draft Plan states that its approach to achieving its four Priority Outcomes is horizontally and vertically integrated. The Draft Plan would be improved with an explanation of what this means and how this approach relates to achieving the objectives of the RMPS. A hierarchy of outcomes being sought that aligns with RMPS objectives would improve the Plan.

The Tasmanian Government has included contemporary governance as one of the Priority Outcomes in the Draft Plan. However, as good governance is essential to achieving all the other Priority Outcomes—both for industry and for the Tasmanian community—the Australia Institute considers that contemporary governance should be the top Priority Outcome, and placed clearly above industry sustainability. To achieve Tasmania’s RMPS objectives, the Priority Outcomes should be reprioritised as follows: 1. Contemporary governance, 2. Healthy ecosystems, 3. Prosperous communities, and 4. Sustainable industry.

This reflects the prioritisation outlined by the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, Australia’s commitment through the High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean, and the decision adopted by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Montreal in December 2022,<sup>5</sup> among others. It also reflects the prioritisation within the latest report from Blue Economy Cooperative Resource Centre (CRC) *Tasmania’s Sustainable Ocean Economy Beyond 2033: Ambition Aquaculture*.<sup>6</sup>

### **Recommendation 2:**

To achieve Tasmania’s RMPS objectives, the Plan’s outcomes should be reprioritised as 1. Contemporary governance, 2. Healthy ecosystems, 3. Prosperous communities, and 4. Sustainable industry.

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<sup>5</sup> Decision Adopted by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity 15/4. Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework <https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-15/cop-15-dec-04-en.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> BECRC (2022) *Tasmania’s Sustainable Ocean Economy Beyond 2033: Ambition Aquaculture*, [https://blueeconomycrc.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/BECRC\\_Ambition-Report\\_Aquaculture\\_A4\\_e151122.pdf](https://blueeconomycrc.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/BECRC_Ambition-Report_Aquaculture_A4_e151122.pdf)

# Priority Outcome: Contemporary Governance

## First Nations rights

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Tasmanian Aboriginal communities are best placed to respond to improvements to the Draft Plan to strengthen recognition of their rights. The Institute strongly encourages meaningful engagement with First Nations representatives and commends the appointment of an Aboriginal Fisheries Officer and On Country Rangers to the Department.

### **Recommendation 3:**

There should be direct engagement with First Nations Tasmanians to ensure that appropriate recognition of Tasmanian Aboriginal rights are reflected in the Plan.

## Absence of Government policies

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The Draft Plan and Workplan have been developed in the absence of a range of relevant Government policies and up-to-date legislation. The 1996 Tasmanian Coastal Policy is not listed as influencing the Draft Plan. Relevant legislation is listed for near- and medium-term review and there is a complete absence of other relevant policies or guidance. Policy gaps identified in the Workplan include guidance on the application of the *Marine Farming Planning Act 1995* (action PO1: 1.1.2), and the release and implementation of the Marine Aquaculture Research Policy (action PO1: 1.1.4). Broader gaps also exist on policies such as nature-based climate solutions and marine conservation. As such, the Draft Plan has been developed in a policy vacuum for a range of issues.

### **Recommendation 4:**

The four guiding principles for the development of the Plan should continue to be applied until all relevant policies have been updated or completed. In particular, there should be no further expansion of the industry until relevant policies have been updated or completed.

# Parliamentary Inquiry into Fin Fish Farming

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The Final Report of the Parliamentary Inquiry into Fin Fish Farming in Tasmania<sup>7</sup> (the “Parliamentary Inquiry”) amounts to a scathing critique of the 2017 Sustainable Industry Growth Plan. In particular, it highlights the many problems faced by the salmon industry, making 194 findings and 68 recommendations. The recommendations provide a sensible and pragmatic approach to addressing the salmon industry’s problems.

The Parliamentary Inquiry’s top recommendation is for a revised Salmon Industry Plan to be developed as one aspect of an overarching Marine Plan for Tasmania. The Government’s response to developing a Marine Plan for Tasmania, is that it is conducting a review of the *Living Marine Resources Management Act 1995* and that it is through this process that the Government will respond to issues or proposals associated with the overall planning and use of Tasmania’s marine environment.

A Tasmanian Marine Plan should be developed for all existing and emerging uses of coastal waters, through a process that considers all uses and users, is based on the best available science, and includes environmental, social and recreational value assessments. The salmon industry supports a move to an integrated and coordinated management framework and the Blue Economy CRC’s *Tasmania’s Sustainable Ocean Economy Beyond 2033: Ambition Aquaculture*<sup>8</sup> also calls for integrated management to be adopted as a matter of priority.

Integrated Management is practiced in many parts of the world, such as Canada, New Zealand, Europe, in Australian waters (3-200nm), the Great Barrier Reef, Victoria and NSW. Victoria has reformed its marine and coastal management over recent years, with the aim of improving coordination and integration across all sectors. The state has brought together existing laws and management plans into a cohesive and coordinated framework.

## **Recommendation 5:**

All of the recommendations in the Final Report of the Parliamentary Inquiry into Fin Fish Farming should be implemented. This should begin with the top recommendation, i.e. “that a revised Salmon Industry Growth Plan be developed as one aspect of an overarching Marine Plan for Tasmania”. The development of the Draft Plan should be paused to align it with broader marine planning for Tasmania.

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<sup>7</sup> Legislative Council Sessional Committee Government Administration A - Sub-Committee (2022) Fin Fish Farming in Tasmania Inquiry [https://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/ctee/Council/GovAdminA\\_Fin.html](https://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/ctee/Council/GovAdminA_Fin.html)

<sup>8</sup> BECRC (2022) Tasmania’s Sustainable Ocean Economy Beyond 2033: Ambition Aquaculture [https://blueeconomycrc.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/BECRC\\_Ambition-Report\\_Aquaculture\\_A4\\_e151122.pdf](https://blueeconomycrc.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/BECRC_Ambition-Report_Aquaculture_A4_e151122.pdf)

### **Recommendation 6:**

Integrated Ocean Management should appropriately consider all uses and users, be evidence-based and include up-to-date environmental, social and recreational value assessments (including an updated State of the Environment Report for Tasmania).

## **Review**

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Neither the Draft Plan nor Workplan include a mechanism for reviewing either final document. Contemporary governance usually includes requirements for reviews or monitoring and evaluation frameworks. These provide regular opportunities to evaluate and improve management practices. Without such triggers, decades can pass without improvements being made. The current review of the *Living Marine Resource Management Act 1995* is a case in point.

There are numerous examples of monitoring and evaluation frameworks. The Tasmanian Government recently established the Office of Review and Evaluation, within the Department of Premier and Cabinet, to support evidence-based decision-making and a culture of continuous improvement across the Tasmanian Government.<sup>9</sup>

The Draft Plan should be amended to include a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework that describes key attributes to monitor. Such a Framework should specify a set of indicators (which may be changed or updated periodically) that aim to describe how aspects of the industry are changing over time.

### **Recommendation 7:**

The final Plan should include a regular review mechanism in the strategic pathways and actions associated with the Priority Outcome on Contemporary Governance.

## **Resource sharing and allocation**

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The current management approach does not explicitly provide a framework for resource sharing, i.e. the allocation of resources between sectors. There are multiple marine sectors in the Tasmanian community: researchers, non-extractive users (including divers and tourism operators), First Nations Tasmanian communities, recreational fishers, commercial fishers, and marine farming operators.

The management framework should provide for resource sharing among sectors. Integrated management and marine spatial planning are effective tools to incorporate ecological,

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<sup>9</sup> Office of Review and Evaluation [https://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/office\\_of\\_review\\_and\\_evaluation](https://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/office_of_review_and_evaluation)



social, cultural and economic information into resource management and can be used to implement resource sharing and allocation.

**Recommendation 8:**

Resource sharing arrangements with regard to access to coastal waters should be spelt out clearly. Where one sector is favoured at the expense of another, compensation should be payable to the sector which loses resource access.

# Priority Outcome: Healthy Oceans

## Precautionary approach

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The value of Tasmania’s globally significant marine biodiversity and endemism should not be underestimated. Access to a healthy environment is a universal human right, on which our own wellbeing depends. Healthy oceans hold the key to a more equitable and sustainable future for our island state.

The final Plan needs to recognise this by linking the Plan to the RPMS and further prioritising the importance of maintaining ecological processes and other sustainable development goals.

It has been 13 years since the last integrated assessment of ecosystem health by resource managers in Tasmania. This means that the Tasmanian Government is often flying blind, without adequate information about what is happening in Tasmania’s coastal waters. It is clear that significant problems exist in those waters, but we do not always have the full picture of those problems.

Climate change is adding to, and in some cases exacerbating the effects of existing stressors. The Australian Academy of Science estimates that over the past decade, more than 40% of Australia’s marine habitats have been severely impacted by extreme climate events.<sup>10</sup> This has impacted coastal protections and is reshaping local ecosystems.

The east coast of Tasmania is a recognised hotspot for changes occurring as a result of climate change. Scientists estimate these waters are warming almost four times faster than the global average and this is projected to continue.<sup>11</sup> Considerable uncertainty still exists especially where rapid change is underway and it is likely to be some time before these uncertainties are adequately resolved.

Meanwhile, the various uses of Tasmania’s ocean continue to expand and compete with one another. A practical response to this situation is to take a precautionary approach, which would include improving risk or vulnerability assessments, updating ecosystem condition assessments (i.e. State of the Environment Reports), implementing effective integrated ecosystem-based management—and, until these have been implemented, continuing the moratorium on any further expansion of the salmon industry.

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<sup>10</sup> Future Earth Australia (2021). Sustainable oceans and coasts national strategy 2021-2030. Australian Academy of Science, Canberra, Australia <https://www.futureearth.org.au/publications/sustainable-oceans-and-coasts-strategy>

<sup>11</sup> Bennett, S. *et al.* (2016) The “Great Southern Reef”: Social, ecological and economic value of Australia’s neglected kelp forests. *Marine and Freshwater Research* 67, 47–56

The Australian Marine Sciences Association recommendation to this effect on ocean management under climate change is:<sup>12</sup>

*“The increasing threat posed by anthropogenic climate change reinforces the need and importance of effective and equitable management of marine systems and threatened species, including improved vulnerability assessments, fisheries management, marine protected areas and integrated coastal zone planning, all of which take cognisance of anticipated future climate change. Such management actions will not necessarily eliminate impacts of climate, but reduce pressure on marine species to maximise their potential for adaption to changing conditions.”*

There is an increasing trend towards evidence-based management for marine resources internationally. However, the requirement for evidence of impacts to enable decision making can appear to be at odds with a precautionary approach to management.

The precautionary principle calls for preventive actions in the face of uncertain information about serious environmental risks. The Plan should specify this principle in the strategic pathways associated with the healthy ecosystems Priority Outcome and associated actions.

**Recommendation 9:**

The final Plan should explicitly adopt a precautionary approach in the strategic pathways associated with the healthy ecosystems priority outcome and associated actions.

## Marine spatial planning

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The Australia Institute supports the use of marine spatial planning in Tasmania’s coastal waters. However, while this can be an effective tool to implement integrated management, it requires appropriate decision rules in order to achieve agreed objectives. This again reinforces the need for appropriate policies and management frameworks, for without these, there is no guidance in the application of the tool.

When done well, marine spatial planning is:

- A well-recognised methodology for incorporating best-available science into decision-making processes, and an effective way to incorporate social, cultural and economic information into those processes;
- An excellent tool to plan for the various uses of ocean resources as various uses continue to expand and compete with one another in the future;
- A participatory process that is inclusive, open and evidence-based, and includes all stakeholders in its planning process.

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<sup>12</sup> AMSA (2022) AMSA Position Statement: Climate Change

Many scientists agree that spatial management is a core component of good marine resource management.<sup>13</sup> It is a key tool used to implement integrated ecosystem based management. It is also effective at resolving conflict because everyone participating can see how resources are being shared.

To date, planning for aquaculture in Tasmania has not used comprehensive marine spatial planning. IMAS has stated that its planning is designed to achieve the objectives of only one industry: fin fish farming. However, IMAS also recognises that there is no reason its planning could not be integrated into a more comprehensive planning process.

Marine spatial planning normally includes all sectors and values. As such, single-sector spatial planning—which includes only information relevant to one individual industry or sector—is not marine spatial planning by its usual and well-recognised definition.

Victoria provides a good example of how a comprehensive marine spatial planning framework can be developed. The state's *Marine and Coastal Act 2018* requires scientific evidence and data, along with the views of rights-holders and stakeholders, as input for the development of a state-wide marine spatial planning framework. This framework has three primary functions:<sup>14</sup>

1. To support integration and coordination of planning and management across marine sectors, the land-sea interface and jurisdictional boundaries;
2. To support Traditional Owners, marine sectors, marine users and the community participate in marine planning and management; and
3. To provide a process for initiating, approving and undertaking marine spatial planning.

**Recommendation 10:**

The Plan should be amended to clarify the need for the development of broad marine policy settings ahead of the use of marine spatial planning.

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<sup>13</sup> Little LR, Day J, Haddon M, et al. *Comments on the evidence for the recent claim on the state of Australian fish stocks*. *Aquatic Conserv: Mar Freshw Ecosyst*.2019;29:329-330.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/aqc.2992330>COMMENTARY AND CORRESPONDENCE ARTICLE

<sup>14</sup> State of Victoria. (2020) *Marine and Coastal Policy*. <https://www.marineandcoasts.vic.gov.au/coastal-management/marine-and-coastal-policy>.

## Sensitive, sheltered and biodiverse coastal waters

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The Parliamentary Inquiry received 224 written submissions.<sup>15</sup> Many of these highlighted a wide range of concerns regarding ecosystem impacts associated with the scale and pace of salmon industry development. These included:

- Higher nutrient loads affecting macroalgal assemblages on reefs some distances from fish farms;
- Impacts arising from jellyfish and algal blooms;
- Seal relocations;
- Biosecurity risks;
- Impacts on rare, threatened, and endangered species; and
- Marine debris.

Jellyfish blooms are an emerging phenomenon in Tasmania and elsewhere. They arise from a feedback mechanism resulting from warmer waters and increased nutrient loads arising from rapid expansion of fish farms in Tasmania. Their effects extend beyond aquaculture species to the entire ecosystem as the jellyfish feed directly on fish, and also on the eggs and larvae of all marine species.<sup>16</sup>

The environmental disaster that took place at Macquarie Harbour in 2017-18 saw significantly reduced dissolved oxygen levels, an abundance of Dorvilleid worms (reliable indicators of anoxia in seafloor environments), outbreaks of fish diseases, and mass mortality events.<sup>17</sup> This was driven by overstocking and a reverse precautionary approach in the management of salmon farms. The disaster did not only affect salmon farms (in May 2015 Petuna lost 85,000 fish because of low levels of dissolved oxygen) and the immediate marine environment—it also extended to a section of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. The health of the harbour as a whole, and that of its threatened and endangered species, were also severely impacted.<sup>18</sup> Concerns about the survival of Maugean skate continue.

National inquiries into aquaculture have also seen the environmental impacts of salmon farming raised as key concerns. These include the 2015 Senate Inquiry into the Fin Fish Aquaculture Industry in Tasmania and the 2021 House of Representatives Australian Aquaculture Sector Inquiry.

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<sup>15</sup> Legislative Council Sessional Committee Government Administration A Sub-Committee Fin Fish Farming in Tasmania Inquiry (2022) [https://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/ctee/Council/GovAdminA\\_Fin.html](https://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/ctee/Council/GovAdminA_Fin.html)

<sup>16</sup> Gershwin, L. (2019) Submission GAA/FIN 40 to the Legislative Council Sessional Committee Government Administration A Sub-Committee Fin Fish Farming in Tasmania Inquiry.

<sup>17</sup> Kirkpatrick et al, 'The reverse precautionary principle: science, the environment and the salmon aquaculture industry in Macquarie Harbour, Tasmania, Australia', *Pacific Conservation Biology* 25(1).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

The third recommendation of the Parliamentary Inquiry recommended reducing inshore fin fish farming sites, with priority given to ceasing operations in sensitive, sheltered and biodiverse areas. The best available science also continues to find concerning impacts of salmon farming in these waters.

Unfortunately, the Draft Plan does not commit to removing finfish farms from these areas. Instead, the Government intends to honour 'existing statutory processes, plans and rights and support 'marine farming lease re-configurations that have a positive social and economic effect and maintain or improve environmental and biosecurity performance'.

**Recommendation 11:**

The final Plan needs to recognise and plan for the removal of fin fish farms from sensitive, sheltered inshore waters within specified timeframes.

# Priority Outcome: Prosperous communities

The Australia Institute's research has previously explained some of the pitfalls of simplistic employment figure statistics.<sup>19, 20</sup> However, the Institute recognises the importance of the salmon industry to Tasmania's economy.

A major shortcoming of current policy is that with the sole exception of abalone royalties, the Tasmanian community does not receive an economic return from the commercial use of its marine resources. Revenue from private sales and exports does not accrue to the public, despite public resources being exploited. Questions have long been asked about whether Australia's policy settings are providing appropriate community returns.<sup>21</sup> With all three salmon companies now in foreign hands, there is an urgent need to strengthen returns to the Tasmanian community for the use of its public resources.

A significant improvement on the status quo will be achieving the aim of full cost recovery by July 2023, as stated in the Draft Plan. Fees and licencing are important parts of regulating Tasmanian fisheries, but this revenue is aimed simply at recovering management costs, not providing a return to the community. The absence of an economic return beyond the recovery of management costs to the community is poor policy from an economic and equity perspective.

Previous Australia Institute research has highlighted the potential mechanisms for improving community returns demonstrated by Norwegian aquaculture policy.<sup>22</sup> The public benefit to Norwegians from the salmon industry comes from auctioning biomass licenses, as well as other taxes and fees. This research also noted the potential case for royalties on aquaculture operations if the public resource was conceived of as a community's waterways rather than its fish. Changing generous leasing arrangements to the Norwegian model could raise \$2 billion for community development.

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<sup>19</sup> Minshull, L. and Browne, B. (2019) *Making mountains out of minnows: Salmon in the Tasmanian economy*. The Australia Institute

<sup>20</sup> Browne, B. (2018) *Fishing for compliments: Fishing in the Tasmanian economy*. The Australia Institute

<sup>21</sup> Rodgers, T. and Webster, S. (2007) *Resource rent mechanisms in Australian primary industries: some observations and issues*. Paper presented at the 51st Annual Conference of the Australian Agricultural and Resource Economics Society Conference

<sup>22</sup> Minshull, L. and Browne, B. (2019) *Making mountains out of minnows: Salmon in the Tasmanian economy*. The Australia Institute

**Recommendation 12:**

An economic return should be paid to the community for the private use of public resources. This should be negotiated in advance of any new policy decision. This could be achieved through royalty payments, auctions of leases or other mechanisms.



# Conclusion

Tasmania's marine resources are a public asset. They are owned and managed by the state on behalf of, and for the benefit of, all Tasmanians. Recent years have seen a deterioration of the condition of Tasmania's coastal waters due to a number of factors, including salmon farming, fishing, climate change, introduced species and pollution. Without consideration for all of our oceans' values and activities, Tasmania's globally significant marine life will continue to suffer.

The Australia Institute's research has found that the legislative and regulatory frameworks that manage marine resource use operate in isolation and need to be modernised and integrated. The best way to do this—and to address the state of Tasmania's oceans—would be to consider concurrently all the activities and sectors that use our coastal waters, and to include them in planning and management considerations. Taking such an approach is the leading recommendation of the Parliamentary Inquiry.

The current Draft Plan prioritises the salmon industry's interests above its other Priority Outcomes, i.e. good governance, ecosystem health and community prosperity. The salmon industry itself supports a move to an integrated and coordinated management framework. We look forward to working together with the Government and industry to achieve this.

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