

Ocean farming big fish Andrew Forrest makes waves as Albany fishers fear being 'pushed aside'

ABC Great Southern / By Daniel Mercer and Tom Edwards

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Andrew and Nicola Forrest want to be major global players in aquaculture. (ABC Great Southern: Tom Edwards)

Plans by Australia's richest man Andrew Forrest to become a big fish in the global aquaculture industry have raised alarm among West Australian commercial fishers who say their livelihoods are on the line.

As it emerged Mr Forrest had upped his stake in [Tasmanian salmon farmer Huon Aquaculture to 18.5 per cent](#), fishers from Albany on WA's south coast said they could be squeezed out by the billionaire's broader aquaculture ambitions.

Through his private investment company Tattarang, Mr Forrest wants to become one of the world's biggest producers of oysters by developing a [shellfish farming hub in Albany's protected harbours](#).

Key points:

- Andrew Forrest wants to develop a shellfish farming hub at Albany in WA
- The billionaire is spending millions of dollars investing in seafood including an 18 per cent stake in Huon Aquaculture
- Local fishers are worried they could be displaced by Albany aquaculture

But the plans have sparked concern among the plans town's historic fishing families, who say they could go to the wall if crucial areas are handed over to aquaculture.

The stand-off comes ahead of a state government decision on where new aquaculture zones will be established.

'Welcome' not unconditional

While the Commonwealth controls elements such as research, biosecurity and trade, most of the regulation of the industry sits with the states and territories.

Under the WA draft proposal, almost 500 additional hectares would be released for aquaculture in waters around Princess Royal Harbour and King George Sound.

Gavin Jackman, a fourth-generation fisher, said he supported the idea of aquaculture in Albany but argued it should not prejudice existing fishing activities.



Commercial fisherman Gavin Jackman is worried he'll lose access to key fishing grounds.
(ABC Great Southern: Tom Edwards)

Mr Jackman claimed he would lose access to vital fishing grounds if a proposed aquaculture zone at Shoal Bay in Princess Royal Harbour went ahead, and said it would wipe out up to half of his income.

The 49-year-old stressed he was not asking for the aquaculture plans to be scrapped – only that they be scaled back or adjusted to accommodate existing fishers.

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"We welcome aquaculture here but the areas they're proposing to take up are huge," Mr Jackman said.

"And it's the displacement in the fishery that we're really concerned about in these estuaries.

"They're pretty pristine waters and important fisheries for all of us here and the areas where we can work with different winds when these [aquaculture zones] are in place, could shut us down in the summer months.

"We want to be able to share the water ... not just be pushed to one side."

Proposal threatens 'displacement'

Like many of the local fishers, Mr Jackman acknowledges his operation is relatively small-scale and he depends heavily on the weather to go fishing.

However, he points out that most of his product is sold directly to local consumers who often prefer fresh local product.



Gavin Jackman, left, is a fourth-generation Albany fisher. (ABC Great Southern: Tom Edwards)

WA Fishing Industry Council boss Darryl Hockey said such local supply could be jeopardised by any push to expand the aquaculture industry that came at the expense of other operations.

Mr Hockey said it was imperative the government struck the right balance between encouraging a growth industry in aquaculture and protecting historical fishing rights.

"The fishermen in those areas have been encroached upon by all sorts of other activities over the years," he said.

"So, whether it's this issue or whether it's recreational fishing or whether it's the imposition of marine parks, the fishermen down there are slowly losing their ability to fish.

"And that's having economic and psychological consequences for the sector."



There are big plans for an aquaculture hub in Albany, WA. (ABC Great Southern: Tom Edwards)

Mr Hockey said that while fishers had a "long history and tradition" in areas such as Shoal Bay, there was plenty of room for the traditional and aquaculture industries to coexist.

"We do believe there are some other areas which aquaculture can exist in and which aren't going to impinge on commercial fishing areas," he said.

"It's a matter of collaboration. Let's just find [a] win-win solution."

Asked about the concerns yesterday, Dr Forrest said he was unaware of them, however, he said he was happy to hear from the fishers.

"I'd be delighted to speak to those anglers," he said.

"There's about 300 miles and we're not affecting any of it."

Forrest: 'We're going after it hard'

Last year, when announcing his Albany aquaculture plans, Dr Forrest declared he wanted to achieve "several thousand per cent growth" in the production of oysters.

Since then, Dr Forrest has outlined further plans to grow shellfish and finfish in WA's north while becoming a major shareholder in ASX-listed salmon producer Huon.

Yesterday, Huon revealed that, through Tattarang, Mr Forrest had increased his stake from 7.7 per cent to almost 20 per cent in a move pundits believed was a challenge to plans by Brazilian meat processing giant JBS to take over the company.

Key to the Albany ambitions was farming at scale the akoya oyster – a variety before grown for food and for which Mr Forrest hoped to secure premium prices in seafood markets.

"I'd like to think that from the tiny industry we are now ... we could grow to several per cent of the world market," Mr Forrest said at the time.

"What that does is bring critical mass into the seafood industry of Western Australia, into the shellfish industry of Western Australia, which gets us on to the world map, which is good for everybody and we all grow together."



Mistaken Island, Albany, where the state wants to expand aquaculture leases. (ABC Great Southern: Tom Edwards)

According to Dr Forrest, who achieved a PhD in marine science, [he was drawn to shellfish farming by what he described as the "harvesting of the oceans and of the coastlines and putting nothing back"](#).

By contrast, he said molluscs such as oysters were a natural filter for marine environments, arguing their production was entirely sustainable.

"If we can do it so it's sustainable, so it increases marine life, abundance and biodiversity, plus makes this beautiful protein which gives jobs, employment, economy to the local communities, then it's a win-win for nature and a win-win for mankind," Dr Forrest said.

"That's reasonably rare, so we're going after it hard."

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