

RSPCA told: stay out of salmon

EXCLUSIVE

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The animal welfare lobby has split over salmon farming, with Animals Australia savaging industry certification – including the RSPCA’s – as promoting a trade that is inherently “unsustainable and inhumane”.

Animals Australia has published an analysis of aquaculture certification systems, and is scathing of their inadequacies.

Chief executive Glenys Oogjes told The Australian salmon industry certification gave consumers false confidence, and that it would be better if the RSPCA ended its scheme.

“The aquaculture industry is not sustainable and is not humane – it is akin to battery caging of hens or intensive farming of other species,” Ms Oogjes said.

“You are not going to change the nature of putting salmon, which have instincts to move thousands of kilometres in their lifetime, into a cage to swim in circles.

“You can’t actually make it humane. All of the audit programs we looked at are deficient ... So I much would much prefer that they (RSPCA) not be involved in this area.”

She said while the RSPCA certification – provided to major producer Huon Aquaculture Group – included maximum stocking densities, this did not prevent animal suffering.

Terms used by certification schemes gave consumers a “false impression” of how farming impacted fish and wildlife, she said.

“Saying that (salmon products) are ‘responsibly sourced’ or ‘sustainably grown’, as with the RSPCA allowing use of its name, give the impression that the animals are being raised humanely,” said Ms Oogjes.

“But there are real problems in the industry ... There are injuries; there are diseases, at high rates.

“All of the audit programs, not just the RSPCA, provide in my view a false impression that the industry is environmentally sustainable and humane and that is of great concern.”

RSPCA defended its certification as a means of “improving the lives of farmed animals”.

“If the RSPCA ended its ... scheme for farmed salmon, the only consequence would be

poorer welfare for the fish,” a spokesman said. “Aquaculture remains one of the fastest-growing animal protein production sectors in the world, so as an animal welfare organisation, the RSPCA considers it critical that good welfare is seen as a crucial component of this.”

Tasmanian Salmonid Growers Association spokesman Julian Amos accused Animals Australia of being “just another desktop critic”.

“I will back the certifying authorities before this crowd any day,” Dr Amos said. “What work have they done on salmon farms and with salmon farmers?”

“Stocking density in pens is low... The regulations controlling the industry are strict, and the critics have never explained why they think the regulations are not.”

The Animals Australia analysis found all certification schemes – RSPCA, Aquaculture Stewardship Council, Best Aquaculture Practice and Global GAP – allow seals and birds to be harmed and killed through farming operations.

The analysis says all certification schemes allow salmon to be fed pellets containing chicken and to be fed “more fish than they will ultimately produce in commercial meat”.