

## THE AUSTRALIAN

# Tasmania to cap spread of salmon farms

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Tasmania will cap the spread of salmon farms in response to community concerns but still allow what industry opponents claim is a further “sea grab” by aquaculture companies.

The Gutwein Liberal government on Thursday announced there would be no net increase in fish farm leased areas in Tasmanian waters, under a 10-year plan to start in 2023.

An immediate 12 month moratorium on new leases and exploration permits would apply, but this would not stop new fish pens being deployed in existing, expansive lease areas.

It appears the ban will also allow new farms in existing northwest exploration areas, near Stanley and King Island.

Primary Industries and Water Minister Guy Barnett said beyond that the \$1 billion, rapidly expanding industry would need to farm penned fish further offshore or on land.

“We will develop new research and innovation programs to support salmon farming further offshore in deep waters, including Commonwealth waters, and to increase salmon farming on shore in land based systems,” Mr Barnett said.

He also flagged a review of regulatory fees to provide full cost recovery “and an appropriate return to the Tasmanian community”, as well as a new “director of fin fish compliance” to enforce regulation.

Industry reaction was mixed. Large producer Tassal Group welcomed it as “the right plan at

the right time” but the peak industry Tasmanian Salmonid Growers Association forecast “robust consultation with government”.

Peak business group the Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, was “deeply concerned”. “The government has made a decision which will, on face value, place a cap on the size of our vital salmon industry and inevitably lead to decline and job losses,” said chamber chief executive Michael Bailey.

“I am also shocked that there appears to be have been no industry consultation on this. The immediate 12 month moratorium raises disturbing questions about sovereign risk.”

However, opponents of the controversial industry – linked to [past localised pollution, bacterial mats, mass fish deaths](#) and [fatal wildlife interactions](#) – said the plan was not what it seemed.

“The sea grab is going to happen between now and 2023,” said Peter George, of the Tasmanian Alliance for Marine Protection. “They’ve done a green wash by saying ‘we’re going to do the right thing, but we’re not going to do it for another two years.’”

Environment Tasmania said while the shift was “an admission that they’ve had it wrong”, the moratorium on new leases was not as significant as it sounded.

This was because the government’s plan still allowed new farms in existing, so far unused lease areas.

“Just about all the usable salmon farming areas are currently under lease, even if the farms aren’t currently present,” said ET lead marine campaigner Jilly Middleton. “We want to see an immediate moratorium on new farms going into the water.

“Even with a moratorium on new leases, there’s plenty of opportunity for expansion and intensification.”

The industry, which insists it is sustainable and low-impact and directly or indirectly employs one in 20 Tasmanians, has become a hot political and consumer issue.

At the consumer level, several industry certification schemes have been [undermined by report findings](#), [abandonment by former supporters](#), or a [refusal to provide transparency](#).

Politically, Tasmania's Liberal government is trying to balance its pro-development credentials with a community backlash to salmon farms, including from some traditional Liberal supporters in commercial and recreational fishing.

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