

## THE AUSTRALIAN

# Woolworths review a big worry for Tasmanian salmon farms

**EXCLUSIVE**By **MATTHEW DENHOLM**, TASMANIA CORRESPONDENT and **KYLAR LOUSSIKIAN**

NATIONAL CHIEF OF STAFF

6:43PM SEPTEMBER 8, 2021 •  85 COMMENTS

Woolworths has expressed concern at claims Tasmania's salmon industry certification "may not be fit for purpose", in a potential blow to the controversial \$1bn trade.

The supermarket giant said it was "closely reviewing" the issue, after an independent report commissioned by the WWF concluded that Aquaculture Stewardship Council certification was not designed to prevent damage to the environment.

Any loss of support from Woolworths or Coles would be a significant issue for the industry, which heavily leverages certification labelling in its packaging.

"Like all retailers, we rely on the expert evaluation of government and certification bodies to set sustainable standards for the aquaculture industry," Woolworths Group said in a statement.

"We are concerned by the claims that existing certifications may not be fit for purpose, taking into account unique environments like Macquarie Harbour (in Tasmania's west), and we are closely reviewing the report."

The retailer noted that the WWF-commissioned report was focused on the period leading up to 2018 and that "regulatory reform has since been implemented to enhance standards at Macquarie Harbour".

However, the retailer said it was continuing to “engage with” its advisers at the WWF, [whose chief executive Dermot O’Gorman reportedly conceded Tasmania’s salmon industry was not environmentally sustainable](#), as well as with regulators and the industry itself.

Businessman and salmon industry critic Geoffrey Cousins said the Woolworths statement was “completely inadequate”.

“It doesn’t match the comments made to me by both the chairman of Woolworths and its chief sustainability officer that they would take this matter very seriously,” Mr Cousins said.

“Since WWF advises them on sustainability, they must take into account the comment by the chief executive that the Tasmanian salmon industry in its current form is unsustainable.

---

**New & improved business newsletter.** Get the edge with AM and PM briefings, plus breaking news alerts in your inbox.

[Sign up](#)

---

“The CEO of WWF said the shortcomings of the certification issues in Macquarie Harbour apply to any waterway in the world,” he added.

The WWF report was commissioned to determine why eco-labelling did not prevent environmental damage to Macquarie Harbour following surges in salmon production in 2012 and 2015.

These impacts included mass fish deaths, low dissolved oxygen levels and bacterial mats.

While noting ASC certification was withdrawn after the negative events, the independent review by Seafood Advisory Ltd found: “ASC has not been set up to prevent adverse situations occurring in the first place, and the outcome-focused metrics are not flanked by requirements for mechanisms to address identified potential impacts before they become established.”

ASC has said it was already working to incorporate the report’s recommendations “into a broader review of our standards”.

The Tasmanian Salmon Growers Association said the report was based on historic events and that regulation and practice had greatly improved since.

“Woolies are reviewing the report – they have not accepted the report, just reviewing, and are encouraged by reforms that have been implemented,” said TSGA spokesman Julian Amos.

Coles appeared less concerned than Woolworths, defending salmon certification as “recognised globally” but conceding it was a “dynamic space”.

“We will continue to look at opportunities to support responsible production of our Own Brand seafood,” it said.

Both big retailers face a major environmental campaign over salmon. Large billboards reading “Eating Salmon? Killing Tasmania” are being rolled out in regional Victoria and NSW by Neighbours of Fish Farming.

#### **MATTHEW DENHOLM, TASMANIA CORRESPONDENT**

Matthew Denholm is a multi-award winning journalist with more than 30 years’ experience. He has been a senior writer and Tasmania correspondent for The Australian since 2004, and has previously worked for newsp... [Read more](#)

#### **More stories on this topic**

- [Are buybacks a franked dividend free-kick?](#)
- [AIMS eyes Woolies’ HQ in \\$450m-plus play](#)
- [Woolworths nets \\$54m from Marley Spoon stake sale](#)

#### **Topics**

[Woolworths](#)