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Secretariat
House Standing Committee on Agriculture and Water Resources
Department of the House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Via e-mail

To whom it may concern,

Re: Ensuring a continued prosperous Tasmanian aquaculture industry

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission on the issues raised in the Terms of Reference for this committee.

The Australian Workers' Union (AWU) represents workers in the Tasmanian aquaculture industry, mostly in salmon farming, which employs thousands of Tasmanians. Overwhelmingly, these jobs are full-time permanent positions, at a time when work is becoming increasingly insecure. The industry employs workers with a range of skills, including boat and forklift operators, as well as trade-qualified workers and the many workers who process salmon for sale and consumption. The industry also contributes to improving skills in the region by partnering with local vocational education providers to coordinate its workforce. The industry has an annual revenue of over \$600 million – more than the New Zealand and Irish salmon industries combined.

Salmon is one of Tasmania's high-quality exports with around \$65 million of revenue coming from international markets – and has largely remained stable while other key exports like tourism have faced significant uncertainty during the pandemic. The salmon sector is a

major employer in regional communities like the Huon Valley, the Tamar Valley, the Channel, the West Coast, the north-west, and the Tasman Peninsula. Without it, many further jobs would be lost in these communities.

However, the industry will only continue to retain its success by maintaining its social licence, on the back of effective governance and a commitment to continuous improvement in management. Increasingly, these aims are being undermined by environmental activists are unfairly targeting the industry with a campaign of misinformation and falsehoods.

A world leading industry

The Tasmanian salmon industry is world-leading in its environmental monitoring and compliance activities – particularly in the use of biomass and nitrogen caps. All operating leases conducted environmental monitoring and the overwhelming majority – 94 per cent – were compliant. The CSIRO, which has also made submissions to this inquiry, has an important role in utilising data from this monitoring to assess any relevant impacts.¹

The reputation of the industry is only as good as the reputation of all its participants and the swift rectification of issues as they arise. Where excessive biomass has resulted in environmental impacts historically (for instance, in Macquarie Harbour), monitoring and compliance has rightly increased as has improved practice. The modern Tasmanian salmon industry bears little resemblance to its earliest years and the adoption of adaptive management approaches ensures that the industry keeps pace with best environmental practice.

¹ Salmon Industry Environmental Scorecard, published by the Tasmanian Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment.

A campaign of misinformation

The Tasmanian salmon industry and those AWU members who rely on it for their livelihoods has suffered great damage from significant and deliberate misinformation about its ecological and animal welfare impacts.

This is a highly technical, responsible and ethical industry that Tasmanians – indeed all Australians – should be rightly proud of. Governments of all persuasions should encourage its continue operation and growth.

The reality for those who live and work in the area is quite different. Contrary to some wildly inflammatory, inaccurate and specious claims:

- **A thriving environment:** Other marine life thrives in Tasmania's regions, with both commercial and recreational fisheries continuing to prosper.
- **Smaller ecological footprint:** Farmed Atlantic salmon has a higher 'feed conversion ratio' than wild salmon, deep-sea fish or land-based animals, making it a more sustainable and ecologically friendly choice. Reductions in farmed salmon supply would likely, on net, harm the environment as other more ecologically intensive protein sources – such as wild fish or land animals – are substituted for healthy, abundant Tasmanian salmon.
- **No drug use:** Prophylactic antibiotics and growth hormones are **not** used; rather, antibiotics are used rarely and only as and when needed for fish welfare.
- **RSPCA Approved:** The RSPCA has developed an Approved Farming Scheme independent of the industry itself. This standard is used in Tasmania. RSPCA approved salmon have oxygen-rich water to swim in, are closely monitored to ensure they are kept in good health, enjoy enough space to swim effortlessly, and can perform schooling behaviour with other salmon.

- **On-land farming is not a substitute:** While land-based farming is used effectively in the raising of newly-hatched salmon, the ability to use this technology for the whole lifecycle is in its infancy. Contrary to claims about its environmental benefits, land-based farming creates additional waste management issues as well as increasing the electricity demand of the sector.

The facts speak for themselves

The AWU has worked hard to advocate for its members and the broader community by pushing for better pay and conditions in the sector, as well as via our 'Save Tassie Salmon' campaign – which educates the world about the incredible industry we have right here at home.

AWU members, the local Tasmanian community and those who enjoy eating Australian salmon have the right to information that is not unduly politicised or prosecuted in bad faith.

The AWU will push for the continued success of one of Tasmania's most important industries. We would welcome any opportunities to provide further information, including by appearance at hearings for this inquiry.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Walton', written in a cursive style.

Daniel Walton
National Secretary
AUSTRALIAN WORKERS' UNION