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Submission on Aquaculture

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From Marlborough Recreational Fishers' Association

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Summary

The Marlborough Recreational Fishers Association is not opposed to marine farming as long as environmental and recreational compatibility is maintained. In terms of the Marlborough Sounds, the association considers there are sufficient marine farms.

The association sees a relationship to overall fisheries management where some see aquaculture as a panacea for fisheries production. We emphasise fish farming is o substitute for proper management of the total fishery.

It is important the proposal is not rushed through at the expense of full and proper public debate.

Discussion

MRFA opposes the introduction of new aquaculture management areas or the extension of existing aquaculture areas around the Marlborough coastline. Marine farms have often been placed over important recreational fishing areas and shellfish beds.

Regulations have attempted to put restraints in place (e.g. to within 200 metres of shore) but extensions have been allowed in areas such as the Pelorus Sound.

Recreation, particularly fishing, is an important public utilisation of the Marlborough coastline. There is a growing demand for access to sheltered bays and inlets for recreational use and anchorages. A marine farm is essentially an occupational right that "privatises" part of the public's sea bed.

Fish farming is far removed from harvesting natural fisheries. Caged, fin fish farming will tarnish the much vaunted clean, 100% pure image which New Zealand promotes on export markets.

It should be noted fish farming has caused severe problems overseas. It is as one authority described it, 'high risk, capital intensive, marginally economical.' The Japanese government has spent millions of dollars over the past decade to clean up after large-scale, intensive inshore aquaculture. Land based aquaculture operations have been the alternative. The Japanese experience should be investigated.

Recreational fishing space has been compromised by marine farming. While some snapper fishing can be obtained by tying up to farm buoys, the effects of sedimentation on the sea floor underneath farms has related in a loss of fishing habitat for other species.

Another aspect is the proven fact (1999) that mussels ingest mesozooplankton (i.e. fish eggs or larvae.) This is particularly important in the Sounds with the likelihood the Marlborough Sounds blue cod spawn on the east coast with eggs drifting on the northward flowing current and seeding the Sounds.

Research is urgently needed on (a) the actual spawning grounds of blue cod and (b) the relationship of farmed mussels to egg drift.

Because of incompatibility with environmental, ecological and recreational fishing values, MRFA rejects the suggestion to allow development of aquaculture outside Aquaculture Management Areas (AMA). If aquaculture zones are to be established then they should only apply to existing AMAs subject to keeping within the "carrying capacity" of the established area.

Proposed reforms may limit the involvement of the public in planning processes and consultation. Any system needs to ensure proper and full opportunity is given to the non-commercial community to participate in decisions on any aquaculture proposals.

Inshore marine space is public property akin to the "commons". Traditional access to the coast and inshore waters plus navigation rights, must not be eroded by aquaculture which after all, is simply private profiteering.

Local councils must be free to prohibit marine farms within their jurisdiction area, to satisfy the public's rights and needs. No government or cabinet minister directive should be allowed to override a local council decision or change regional plans, relative to aquaculture. Proposed changes to the Environment Court appeal process are detrimental to non-commercial environmental and recreational fishing interests.

MRFA does agree with the recommendation to lower the consent lapse period from five to three years.

There is a lack of knowledge about the full impacts of aquaculture, e.g on post-spawning larval drift. Research is urgently required.