

## **Media Statement**

### **Marine consenting bill a mess for Marlborough**

Proposed blanket extensions for marine farms will make aquaculture in Marlborough a lot more uncertain, a Marlborough Sounds resident has told MPs considering the Bill to extend the coastal permits for marine farms by up to 20 years.

Trevor Offen appeared before the Primary Industries select committee at Parliament on June 24 on behalf of the Kenepuru and Central Sounds Residents Association Inc, the Clova Bay Residents Association Inc, and the Guardians of the Sounds Inc.

He says the Bill is particularly problematic for Marlborough, the biggest aquaculture region in New Zealand.

Marlborough has few of the problems the Bill aims to fix, and council planning rules had been agreed that both accommodates environmental standards and facilitates a streamlined renewal of aquaculture permits, Trevor Offen says.

A key plank of this is identifying where aquaculture is appropriate and where it is inappropriate, he told MPs.

“The Bill will substantially frustrate this process and the years of collaborative work behind it.

“It will simply enable all aquaculture in inappropriate places to remain while, ironically, putting a real cloak of uncertainty over aquaculture in appropriate places. Under the new Marlborough rules, appropriate places are contingent on the inappropriate places not being used for aquaculture.”

Trevor Offen says the Bill proposes to extend all existing aquaculture resource consents, “no questions asked, warts and all, for 20 more years”.

“This renews resource consents without regard to environmental standards and due democratic process.”

The Bill is supposed to give greater investment certainty and avoid excessive resource consent renewal costs, Trevor Offen says. But uncertainty is unavoidable with any environmentally exploitive activity, as are costs.

“There is no happy ending if this environmental perspective prevails.”

More importantly, there is no evidence in Marlborough that either re-consenting uncertainty or excessive re-consenting costs are actually a problem, he says.

“This is recognised by the Ministry for Primary Industries which has reported, through its Regulatory Impact Statement, that the proposals stand as worse than doing nothing. “

There are approximately 1,200 existing marine farms in New Zealand that require one or more resource consents (coastal permits) under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) to operate, the Bill’s promoters say.

The Bill would extend the current duration of all coastal permits currently issued under the RMA authorising aquaculture activities by 20 years, but not beyond 2050. The extension would apply to all marine farms that hold a current resource consent at the time the bill commences, and would be granted automatically, without requiring an application from the consent holder.

Trevor Offen says allowing inappropriate farming to continue will “of course” have significant ecological, navigation, and other ramifications.

“Why, you might ask, are proposals to ride rough-shod over environmental standards and democratic process, absent of any evidence backed basis or political mandate, and that officials advise are actually worse than doing nothing, being nonetheless waved through our political process?”

While the National/NZ First coalition agreement wants to “deliver longer durations for marine farming permits “, this is not a mandate to bypass democratic process and environmental standards, Trevor Offen says.

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