
MARINE Life
Spring 2023

Cover photo: Bull kelp, Jun Zhang

Tassie Shores stripped of marine life

Our members have told us that, as a result of a post COVID increase in the numbers of overseas travellers, there has been a noticeable increase in the foreshore collection of shells and other intertidal animals for food in recent times.

We have reports from as far afield as Taroona in the Derwent, and Don Head in Devonport that the seashore has been stripped of all edible life. This kind of fishing activity is environmentally damaging and is entirely unsustainable knocking the entire ecosystem out of kilter. The Government already has some measures in place including catch and possession limits, but these rules appear to be openly flouted. The current restrictions on taking of certain species like elephant snails also appear to be disregarded.

When confronted by our members, who have explained the rules (including showing text in the person's language), the collectors feign ignorance. The issue appears to be a low commitment to voluntary compliance, which has been allowed to continue due to low levels of enforcement.

This seafood collecting is of little economic and social value. Even if a case could be made that it has an social value to a section of the community, intertidal areas have been so stripped in most accessible areas that it is no longer an activity of much practical importance even to this small group.

This experience is not new and it has been an ongoing issue in other jurisdictions. It is our understanding that only places like Pt Cook MPA in Port Philip Bay (previously off-limits as a defence site, and later banned for collecting) have any intertidal animals. Past studies indicate that these areas will recover if fishing ceases for an extended period. We ask that intertidal collecting of native marine animals be banned completely as education and enforcement resources are too limited to ever make this a fishery capable of sustainable management.

This prohibition would have to be enforced with warnings, followed by sanctions like fines. Collecting of feral shellfish like Pacific oysters and exotic mussels could continue, and these species are larger and more desirable for collectors anyway.

You can do something about it, see the Oceanwatch page below.

Citizen Science – Oceanwatch Surveys

OCEANWATCH – Having fun while helping the Ocean

Upcoming Events

There is a new citizen's science project you might be interested in with event planned for Taroona Beach 14 October [Oceanwatch - Fun Educational foreshore walk with Dr Simon Grove | Facebook](),

Dr Simon Grove is our special guest expert.

Then Tinderbox in December [Oceanwatch - Ocean Surveys and Educational Day - Tinderbox MPA | Facebook]() and Southport in January (Still TBA)

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What is it about?

- Oceanwatch is a citizen science program that is an easy way to have some fun and help the ocean.
- Lots of ocean areas have no information about what lives there.
- You can help the ocean while meeting people, having fun with the kids, or even taking the dog for a walk.
- It's for the young or young at heart.
- We are going to collect information on the animals and birds, pick up rubbish, share information on fun sightings, and report on issues as we seen them.

You can even do some surveys of the reef, we will show you how.

- It is going to help make you and your family healthier, happier and more informed.
- Its for volunteers, people who care about the ocean and want to learn more. Events are free.

We will be asking expert mentors to come along and help you get started.

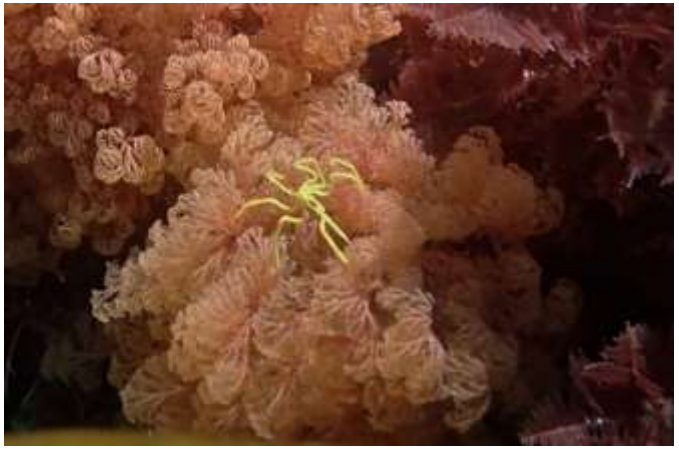
It's a great place for questions, and there are no silly questions. Bring a snorkel, kayak or any other gear you like. Bring your own personal needs like water, sunscreen, hat and maybe a mat or knee pads. The only risks are tripping and slipping, so just be careful.

More Information

It doesn't matter that you don't know anyone or anything, be curious! www.marinelife.org.au or www.marinelife.org.au / "Tasmanians for Marine Parks" on Facebook Email us at marinelifetassie@gmail.com or at Moremarineparks@gmail.com

See forms and links to detailed information at http://marinelife.org.au/?page_id=2891

Photos: Dr Eric Woehler, livescience, California Academy of Sciences



Seaweed you can easily find- Lessonaria

M.Jacques

In Tasmania it can be found down to 18 metres, although it generally occurs as a dense band above *Ecklonia radiata*. It is endemic to southern Tasmania. Although there have been some recordings as far north as Phillip Is, Victoria. There are several species of algae only common in Tasmania, often red algae you need a scientist to identify, but this is one of the species that is relatively easy to identify.

Sea Slug Census

John Smith, Bicheno Nudibranch Ceratosoma brevicaudatum

The Sea slug census started in NSW in 2013 and has now become an Australia wide thing. Its for divers, snorkellers and inter-tidal searchers.

Sea slugs are fantastic looking creatures that are a joy to find, especially nudibranchs which come in a huge range of colours. They are also useful indicators of the way the ocean is changing. Already the census is identifying 60 species that are changing their range and heading south as the oceans warm with climate change.

They have a project page on an on-line app called inaturalist.

The Tasmanian census is timed to coincide with the Victorian Reefwatch census. The idea is to do science that is fun and social.

What do I do?- you head down to your favourite dive, snorkel, or intertidal site and photograph sea slugs. You sign in and upload results get uploaded onto inaturalist. People can log on to the site and help you identify the species, you can also see the results of several citizen science programs, where people like you are busily recording Australia's biodiversity.

I've found seaslugs tricky to find in the intertidal zone, so non-divers might want to combine it with a Tasmanian Oceanwatch intertidal patrol, see this link for details. www.marinelife.org.au/oceanwatch.

Upcoming Event

Ocean watch (a program of Marine Life Network) is collaborating with the Sea Slug Census and Seadragons Dive Group to throw on a get together dive and snorkel event at Spring Beach on the East Coast. Sunday October 22nd 10AM Spring Bch Dive and sea slug hunt | Facebook

However, this is set up so you can do it in your own time too,

Editorial Soapbox

Tassie's Seinfeld Politics – It's about Nothing, by Mike Jacques

Im looking around the potential candidates for the next State election and experiencing the same problem as all other voters, I don't know for sure what many of them stand for. State politics has long been a contest about nothing. For reasons of political strategy, the upcoming election campaign is also likely to be quick and empty of content.

I'm suspicious that some have policies, but its hard to say what they really are from the produced material, which includes statements like "No more politics". I think that's what we already get.

I'm usually sold a sentiment, or a slogan, rather than an idea. Sometimes I get nothing but silence when I raise an issue, as parties try to 'manage the message', make themselves a 'small target', or 'stonewall' an opponent in the hope they won't attract media attention.

Looking for someone to blame, I realise its me. I've got my own things to deal with, and politics often seems dry and negative. I get my daily lift from being at home with the pets and family, not from confronting problems. Its partly about my apathy and short attention span.

I'm scared that what we have in Parliament are people just like us.

I have been attracted to things in the new that make a splash, like a Seinfeld punchline, and been happy just with being entertained. Worse, I can sometimes be seduced by quick, impractical, or even mean solutions.

Our politics is negative because it works. Negative messages are noticed by us more than positive ones.

It isn't fair to expect politicians to produce information I won't engage with, or to understand the detail, when I'm so attracted to the shiniest statement in the room. I've set such a low standard for political engagement and communication that our current and potential representatives have decided to use that free time on other things that give them more of a personal lift.

We are only communicating through narrow channels that filter messages down to short 'click bait' headlines. I don't see much evidence that any time is being devoted to thinking about where we are at, the kinds of challenges that are coming, and what we would like to do better. Politicians often struggle with this, so that's why we have a public service. Unfortunately, that has been heavily politicised as well, until its an echo chamber as empty as the guy in charge. In a changing world, we instead resort to seeking more of the same failed things we have been doing for decades.

Targeting just the needs of swing seats saves sparse party resources. Its easier to sell a motherhood slogan like 'jobs, jobs, jobs'. Who actually wants someone who needs a job to go without work?

These are short term emergency strategies that get used long-term. We now see safe seats that are presumed to be loyal, switch quickly. Sometimes they are over an issue neglected in a 'safe' seat, that didn't appear in the swing seat polling, like climate change.

What we end up with is an episode of Seinfeld without so much humour, it can be engaging, there are some interesting characters but ultimately its about nothing, and it seems like none of it really matters. Tasmanian politics is stagnant.

That matters. The State Government has a wide set of powers to do things that change our lives. Just as important (and more common) is that the State Government can block things that change our lives. In fact, its easier to do that than take the risk with something that might offend a voter somewhere.

One of the challenges that we face is environmental change. Perhaps you don't really care about a particular rare species or wilderness place, but the changes are so widespread, and are coming so fast that there is no excuse for not being more alert to it, at least its implications for food security and bushfires.

We could do with more public engagement. One suggestion, let have a public debate on MPAs. You might not agree with the issue, but 'risky' debate is a habit we should try to get use to.

WILDLIFE ENCOUNTERS

Nature's Fast Food

Source: Edgar's "Australian Marine Habitats"

M.Jacques A weed-covered north coast shipwreck with Dictoyota and crayweed dominating a very varied seaweed bed.

Seaweed beds are nature's fast food outlets, for the marine animal that can't be bothered chasing down a hard to find meal in the open ocean. There is a smorgasboard out there for reef dwellers.

Vegetarian feast

Macroalgae (big seaweeds) can produce 2kg of plant material per m2 of bottom per year, about the same as a paddock, or a seagrass meadow. While seagrass is tough to eat, seaweed is pretty easy for many small animals with little mouths. It's obviously pretty fattening because there may be up to 50,000 of these tiny shrimp-like "mezograzers" on every m2 of seaweed bed. There can be up to 50 separate species of these little critters on just one plant. These are nature's chubby 'fast food' eaters.

While little shrimp-like things like amphipods can tackle seaweed, not many fish can eat whole seaweed. Those that can (like Luderick or Herring Cale) are so successful that they can make up half of the total weight of fish on reefs in Southern Australia. Luderick have a bacteria filled second gut, just like a cow, to help it chow down on the seaweed.

Love those shrimp

One of the most common southern Australian reef fish are Purple Wrasse and Blue-throated Wrasse. They mostly get their energy from seaweed indirectly, by eating the small grazing shrimp-like animals that are eating the kelp. It is common at certain times of the year, to see large clouds of mysid shrimps hovering over the kelp. In fact, almost everything Bastard Trumpeter, leatherjackets, handfish and sea dragons will have a go at these little, but very tasty, amphipods, isopods and mysids.

Seadragons love mysid shrimp too

Seaweed snot for dessert

OK so some fish and shrimp-like animals swim up and eat seaweeds. You can even see little holes forming in fronds as they get nibbled away. What you might not know is that seaweeds shed much more

food into the water that you can't see. Large amounts of organic material leach from seaweeds and are known as mucilage (basically seaweed snot). Big seaweeds like Giant Kelp also shed the tips of their fronds as tiny particles, as a mechanism to get rid of fouling plants and animals. Up to 25% of the plant is lost as mucilage or as dissolved organic matter. A lot more of the seaweed is lost this way, than by grazing from other animals like fish or urchins. Although you can't see this with the naked eye, seaweed beds are literally oozing great masses of food into the surrounding water column.

Sifting through the scraps

Bacteria goes after it all first and 6 grams of bacteria can polish off 100 grams of dissolved weed particles. Other small critters (ciliates, flagellates and amoebas) chew on the bacteria.

These microscopic organisms are food for other filter feeding animals, like the colourful sea squirts and sponges that inhabit the reef. This flood of 'easy' food might partly explain why sea squirts are often very common on seaweed beds, while other invertebrate animals usually find it too hard to compete for space with big plants.

Pyura sea squirts are better adapted than most to survive out on the looser sand. Out there they can feed without too much competition from other filter feeders. They also don't get 'beaten up' by the lashing of big seaweed fronds. As this particular species is a vegetarian, they have most likely found a good spot where the phytoplankton oozing out of the seaweed bed collect thanks to local current eddies.

The Reef Oasis

The productivity of seaweed beds can make them hotspots for biodiversity. So when you hear someone say they are an "open water diver" they are actually a 'temperate seaweed bed' diver, or 'sub-tidal reef' diver. The exciting stuff to look at is mostly found there and divers rarely venture away from this very narrow, and relatively shallow strip of rock hugging the edge of our vast (and relatively barren) continental shelf. These seaweed beds are like a smorgasboard of quick fattening fast meals, the Maccas of the ocean.

Advocacy News

MARINE LIFE NETWORK - What have we been up to?

We were invited up to Devonport to sit in on a meeting of Braddon electorate ENGOs for a group discussion. No this doesn't mean that we are affiliated with the Greens, but they are the only party so far that currently overtly supports our desires.

I was there, but in a movement where people tend to be a members of everything, there were a couple of other TMP followers there in another capacity.

The last party conference I was at was the ALP, and I have to say the Greens one is smaller, with plenty of recognisable faces from the current party and older movement, Nick, Cassie, Rosalie, Peter, Kim Booth, as well as a few newer people. I didn't get involved in the conference itself, but a break out discussion with local groups.

A noticeable thing was the commonality of the problems experienced by the smaller groups, sustaining interest over longer periods, Government stonewalling, hostile or indifferent media.

A comment I liked was the victor is the person who can last one more day than the other side, a good summary of the long, slow, stamina needed in ENGO issues.

POLITICS

Apparently, even the guy who does the cleaning for the Liberal Party offices is threatening to leave Parliament and go clean for the Republic Hotel instead. Elise Archer's resignation has forestalled another no confidence motion, and there is still a Liberal Government, for now. The Liberal Party is shedding right wing parliamentarians who are looking like wanting to form their own block.

The next State election will also expand the size of Parliament, meaning that several new independents are likely to be elected. It looks like coalition governments are here to stay for the foreseeable future.

This is happening everywhere in the world where there is a proportional voting system like Hare Clark. There will be concern about instability in Government, but it will at least shake up the political stagnation we are experiencing. In my view, if the dominant party does do anything, its an unimaginative policy they tried on 20 years ago. Everyone in town with an issue, like us, will soon be pestering these new independents, who are likely to be a mix of left, right and centre.

By the time this article is out something else will have changed.

Right to Information

Environmental Defenders Office has written an open letter alongside five leading civil society organisations to Premier Jeremy Rockliff urging him to urgently fix problems that are plaguing Tasmania's failing Right to Information system.

The letter says:

In recent years, there has been a mounting perception that Tasmanian government agencies are increasingly obstructing public access to information.

More info, [Peak organisations urge Premier Rockliff to fix the state's Right to Information system - Environmental Defenders Office (edo.org.au)]

ON GROUND GADFLYS

Here are some links to some of the ENGOs that are operating in the north of the State

Bob Brown Foundation, bob brown foundation - Search Results | Facebook

NW Tas for Clean oceans, NWTAS for CLEAN OCEANS (no salmon feedlots) | Facebook

Restore Lake Pedder, Drain and restore Lake Pedder, Tasmania | Facebook

Climate Action NW,

Circular Hd Coastal Awareness Network Circular Head Coastal Awareness Network Inc | Facebook

Wilderness Society Launceston. Facebook

North West Environment Centre Facebook

Friends of Low Head Penguin colony friends of low head penguin colony - Search Results | Facebook

NRM North Facebook

Seaweeds you can find at your local beach

Undaria

This seaweed was introduced to Tasmania in ship's ballast water and has taken over many areas where the seabed has been disturbed by pollution, urchins, or storms. It can reproduce at an enormous rate and be spread quickly by wet fishing and diving gear. It is edible, and is known in Japan as wakame.

It breeds faster than a rabbit and is considered a pest.

Is the world's rarest fish doomed? – Maugean Skate

Professor Graham Edgar discovered the Maugean skate in 1988, and says it is one of the rarest marine animals in the world. The Maugean Skate is the world's only skate known to inhabit brackish water. The species inhabits low-nutrient brackish water, 5–7 metres deep in the shallower upper regions of two estuaries. The species only lives in Macquarie Harbour and Bathurst Harbour, although they may have recently become extinct in the latter. The design is very old and may be a relic from Gondwanaland, a time when the continental plates were pushed together in a supercontinent.

The total range of the species is thought to be no more than 100 km² and the population is estimated at 1000 individuals. "There's no other shark or ray that lives in such a confined area," Professor Edgar said. Dr Neville Barrett from the Institute of Marine and Antarctic Studies found a strong population of the species in Macquarie Harbour but says the area is the site of fish farm expansion and pressure from recreational fishing. "The skate relies on a clean ocean environment, but then so do salmon farmers, so hopefully they can coexist," Dr Barrett once said. "We are aware that the harbour isn't - as some people perceive it - a highly impacted estuary from the mining activities. "It's actually quite pristine, the vast majority of it, and it's an extremely important habitat of course for this species that lives nowhere else on earth."

Since the time of those statements Dr Barrett has recently come out with much scarier update on the likely fate of one of Australia's most unique fish. In October 2022, the federal environment minister, Tanya Plibersek, unveiled a 10-year action plan to prevent extinction for 110 priority species, including the skate. The government said it aimed to have measures in place by 2027 for "an improved trajectory" by 2032. It sounds like that's going to be too little too late.

"There's lots of evidence to say that the population is in very serious decline," Dr Neville Barrett said. "I personally predict it's likely to be extinct within a decade on the current trajectory."

Associate Professor Jayson Semmens, the head of the skate research program at IMAS backed up those comments, "We have seen mortality events, and they are sudden and impossible to predict … They have the potential to remove … a large proportion of animals," he said.

The horror period was 2016 when there was a large drop in dissolved oxygen in the middle and southern parts of the harbour[1]. It has improved since then, but maybe not enough. In 2016 about 3200 skate were estimated to live in Macquarie Harbour. Physiological experiments demonstrated that adult Maugean Skate are quite capable of surviving chronic exposure to hypoxic conditions (< 20% DO), but in the long-term it seems to do them no good. There is an apparent decline in the number of young skates in the population[2]. This was attributed to "recent changes in the environmental health of the harbour (especially dissolved oxygen levels), coupled with the consequences of climate change (including occurrence of extreme weather events)" may already be challenging the skate's capacity to cope with the environmental conditions in Macquarie Harbour."

While the skates can briefly tolerate warmer surface or saline bottom waters, the species prefers zones around 10 metres deep with dissolved oxygen levels of between 60 and 80 per cent. Fish farming in the harbour has been badly affecting oxygen levels and, while it has been heavily reduced in recent years, people have even been calling for it to stop completely.

Speaking at an ocean summit hosted by the Australia Institute, Dr Barrett said Tasmania faced a choice between allowing the skate to go extinct or potentially losing "several hundred million dollars revenue", if the aquaculture industry could not move their fish elsewhere and if leases were rested for several years.

Sorry Nev, this is inaccurate, the entire Tasmanian 2018/19 direct value (GVA) for aquaculture was $230M, with $650M total economic benefit, and Macquarie Hbr is only part of this total. The Macquarie Harbour EPA maximum permissible biomass is 9500 tonnes. Bartelys give a wholesale smoked salmon spot price of $5000 per tonne to the producer. That's $47.5M gross sales, profit is way less, probably below 1/3rd of that figure. Complaints from the West Coast Council have been that the jobs were taken by people in the North West who commute to work daily, not by local residents. The West Coast Council failed in a bid to charge rates on fish farms, so the social benefit to the West Coast has been limited.

"It's a hard decision. This is a hard conversation. But you know, it's been really hard to say this stuff because it is difficult for the general public to access and understand all of this," Dr Barratt said.

The recent Scalefish Review has proposed banning netting in many parts of the harbour. It's a positive step that Marine Life Network has publicly supported, but we warned than that it might not be enough if oxygen levels were also not managed.

It might be overdue to rethink the stocking levels in Macquarie Harbour, and it might be time that we accepted that industry expansion in this harbour has failed. Perhaps you think the short-term economic and social losses too extreme, but to argue that, you may have to commit a unique creature to extinction. I understand the dilemma, but I'm not ready to assign something so special to memory, or a jar of formaldehyde in a museum.

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1 Microsoft Word - IMAS Progress Report on Macquarie Harbour _ October 2020.docx (utas.edu.au)

[2]Vulnerability of the endangered Maugean Skate population to degraded environmental conditions in Macquarie Harbour David Moreno, Jeremy Lyle, Jayson Semmens, Andrea Morash, Kilian Stehfest, Jaime McAllister, Bailee Bowen and Neville Barrett, IMAS October 2020

The good news is that there have been some recent attempts to do something about it. More to come in future editions.

Tasmania – Capital of Marine life extinction

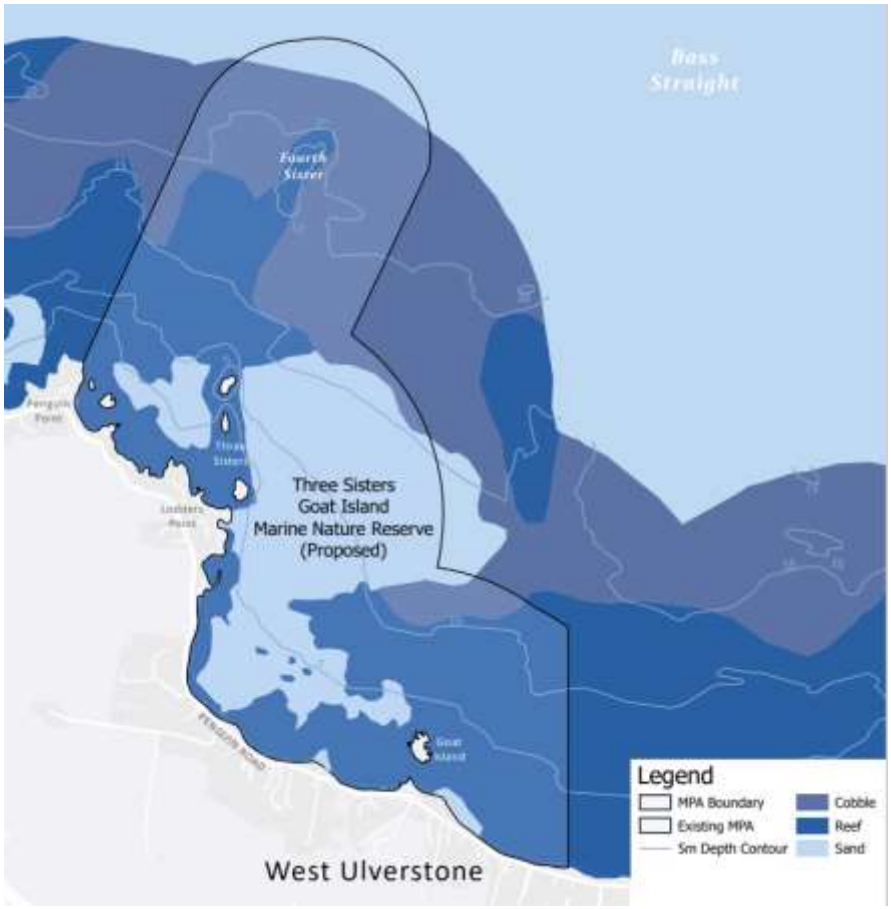
There is one inaccuracy in our headline, the Maugean skate isn't the world's rarest fish by a thin margin. Tasmania has at least two species holding that unwanted title, handfish species. One handfish species is already extinct and the red handfish is on the way. There are other troubled marine species unique to Tasmania, especially mollusc species and echinoderms (starfish), that we haven't bothered to study. We are pretty famour for the thylacine, do Tasmanians really want to be remembered as the marine extinction capital of the world?

Shocking Tale – The Tasmanian Numbfish *Narcine tasmaniensis*

Alan Fletcher

The Tasmanian numbfish is capable of giving off mild but noticeable electric shock, something it uses to deter predators. They prefer muddy estuaries like the Derwent River.

Goat Island MPA Proposal - Ulverstone



Special features of the site

- Nearby penguin rookery
- Aboriginal fish traps
- Geoheritage site
- Spectacular coastal views
- The Third Sister is a known recreational dive site with interesting algal diversity.
- Substantial offshore spire on the Fourth Sister
- Geologically unique
- Moderate representation of Bass Strait fish and invertebrates
- Cobble habitat
- Great bird life

What people have said about the natural values of Goat Island

- Dr Barratt - "would make a valuable contribution to conservation in this region by protecting habitats under-represented in regional reserve proposals, and further protecting the penguin population that come ashore to nest in the associated coastal reserves".

- The Three Sisters- Goat Island Nature Reserve was originally proposed for MPA protection by commercial fishermen.

- Goat Island has long been recognised as a unique geological feature.

- Three Sisters-Goat Island is of sufficient size to show some recovery following industrial pollution.

- Mapping within the proposed Three Sisters-Goat Island protected area revealed three major habitat types. These were reef, sand, and cobble/gravel. The less eroded areas providing the islands and a moderate amount of physical

structure on the reef. The islands and reef appear to be generally of conglomerate origin, and this differs from the basalt found at Lillico Beach.

- Patches of more solid reef are found scattered throughout the cobble area, and likewise cobble in the reef area. A substantial amount of the area nominated for the propagation area is sand, a substrate that essentially fringes the intertidal zone.

- The outer Sisters are subject to more wave exposure At the outer Sister between 0-2 m depth there was a mixed flora and coralline algae. Between 4-6 m, the flora was similar but with Acrocarpia dominant and Ecklonia present. Below 6 m there was virtually no brown algae.

- The abundance of geniculate corallines on this coastline is a unique feature and appears to be due to a higher tolerance than other algae to the high sediment loads found in this area.

- The distribution of fish and invertebrates are patchy. Occasionally there are large aggregations of spider crabs (Leptomithrax gaimardii). These aggregations each contained many thousands of crabs and were concentrated on the outer reef areas.

- Common fishes included Notolabrus tetricus (blue-throated wrasse), Notolabrus fucicola (purple wrasse), Pictilabrus laticlavius (senator wrasse), Trachinops caudimaculatus (hulafish), Cheilodactylus nigripes (magpie perch) and Caesioperca rasor (barber perch).

- The proposed protected area at the Three Sisters-Goat Island Nature Reserve has a number of positive features, including proximity to a terrestrial nature reserve, the inclusion of several notable geomorphological features (the islands), and a substantial offshore extension in the eastern sector, providing protection for a relatively large area of cobble and gravel seabed, a habitat common along the central north coast. The large area of sand inshore however, means that very little solid reef at intermediate depths would be

included in the current proposal, reducing its value for fish stock enhancement and for conservation. The reef in this area has substantially more physical structure than that found at Lillico Beach and is consequently likely to be of more use in enhancing resident fish stocks, particularly if a sufficient amount of reef is eventually included in the proposal.

- The Nature Reserve contains the only known exposed contact between metamorphosed and unmetamorphosed Precambrian rocks in Tasmania, and is therefore highly significant in the evolution of the Tasmanian landscape. Part of this feature is a Precambrian stretched pebble conglomerate, an unusual rock type. The place is of outstanding value as a teaching and research site. The Nature Reserve is a rocky off-shore island and foreshore composed of Precambrian rocks including a stretched pebble conglomerate.

- The vegetation of the area includes a mixture of salt tolerant coastal species, reeds and grasses. It is possible that cultural values, both indigenous and non- indigenous, of national estate significance may exist in this place.

- Dr Barratt - “would make a valuable contribution to conservation in this region by protecting habitats under-represented in regional reserve proposals, and further protecting the penguin population that come ashore to nest in the associated coastal reserves”. The Third Sister is a known recreational dive site with interesting algal diversity.

- The islands are steep-sided. Because landings are difficult owing to the lack of beaches and safe anchoring points they are little affected by human visitation and disturbance, Australian fur seals haul-out on the lowest of them.

- The island group has been identified as an Important Bird Area (IBA) by BirdLife International because, with up to 400 breeding pairs, it supports over 1% of the world population of black-faced cormorants. Pacific gulls and sooty oystercatchers breed there every year in small numbers, and Caspian terns have nested there. White-bellied sea-eagles forage around the islands.

King Island oil drilling

3D Oil and ConocoPhillips are exploration drilling for gas 30km west of King Island in their T49/P lease. This was after an 80 day program of seismic blasting at the end of 2021.

The Wilderness Society Tasmania and Surfrider Australia has been deeply involved in the local protest and don't have much faith in the Regulator, doubting that NOPSEMA's have ever actually declined a project.

"The 3D Oil presentation raises many questions, including the lack of community consultation, the lack of an environmental impact assessment and who is responsible for damage to the marine environment when something goes wrong?" said Ms King.

The Wilderness Society commissioned a local survey in 2021, and more than 90% of respondents rejected the proposal.

"A growing number of corporations want to seismic blast, drill and extract fossil fuels from the seabed of the Great Southern Reef. As well as ConocoPhillips, these companies include Schlumberger, TGS, Beach Energy, CGG and 3D Oil", said Tom Allen for the Wilderness Society Tasmania.

"A critical factor that allows these companies to do this is the Australian Government, which hands out huge slabs of seabed and then permits fossil fuel companies to blast and drill. Everyone else is ignored – Community Rights be damned. It's a closed shop and a racket because there's nothing any member of the public can say or do that can stop it."

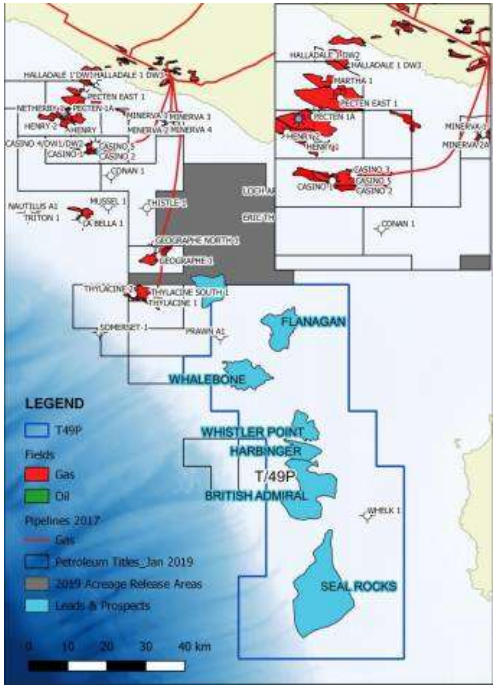
The Wilderness Society pointed to the NOPSEMA website as an example. It says in full *"Please be aware that information that is irrelevant to NOPSEMA's decision making criteria cannot be considered, such as statements of fundamental objection to oil and gas activity, comments that contain personal threats or profanities, SPAM mail, comments made through online social media channels, petitions and comments that pose questions to NOPSEMA and or/the titleholder"*[3]. That is about every conventional advocacy strategy, setting aside profanity for a second (I've seen used but I wouldn't say is a strategy).

Professor Brendan Mackey and Professor Gretta Pecl, responded to the climate change issues in a joint statement:

"The science could not be any clearer: any new fossil fuel development is completely inconsistent with limiting global warming to 1.5 or even 2 degrees as to achieve NZE [net zero emissions] requires a rapid, steep and permanent decrease in fossil fuel emissions this decade, and according to the International Energy Agency, a decrease in natural gas use of 70% by 2050."

"Severe impacts as a function of human-influenced climate change have already been experienced here in Australia and in other countries around the world – to limit further damage, urgent mitigation action is needed to achieve deep and rapid cuts in CO2 emissions from all sources, especially fossil fuels (coal, oil, gas). The risks from allowing business-as-usual, let alone increased, CO2 emissions to push global warming above the 1.5 °C threshold will likely be extreme and have serious and harmful consequences".

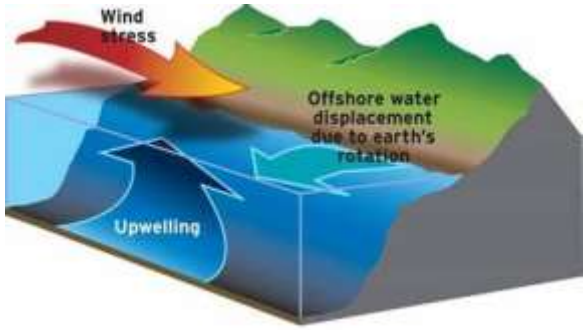
[3] Collaborative Seismic Environment Plan Project - NOPSEMA - Citizen Space



Source: Advocate newspaper

The lease map indicates that this is an area of interest that might actually have gas. There is likely to be ongoing seismic testing and drilling, accelerating if they actually prove a workable field.

A more local concern than climate change is the proximity of the continental shelf break. The area further to the west does have periodic smaller upwelling-like events, which attract seals, dolphins, whales, fish and seabirds from every direction. It isn't as active as the Bonney Upwelling further north on the Victorian coast, but would be seen as a 'hotter than usual' biodiversity area.



How upwellings work, Source: Incomme.org

I'm not convinced there is any kind of quiet 'conspiracy'. The huge sums involved and the strategic importance of gas to the economy, makes the NOPSEMA/Government strategy pretty obvious and out there. They intend to push through oil and gas development no matter what. They seem to worry about major wellhead blowouts and other issues like spills, but that's it. NOPSEMA was created as a response to safety incidents and its legislated objects appear to have no environmental goals. Despite this, in 2014, they were made the *"sole environment regulator in Commonwealth waters by expanding its remit to include matters protected under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act).*[4]*"* That even extended to Commonwealth marine parks. It is a child of the Abbott era. Is it banned profanity if we call it a bastard child? It sounds like the arrangement is well overdue for a revamp. A tricky balance, but it seems that no effort is being made to find one.

[4] Introducing NOPSEMA brochure - A631330.pdf

NW Coast marine farms

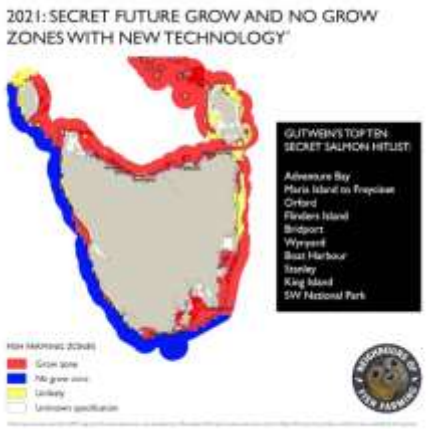
The new ‘kid on the block’ in terms of eco-issues is NW Coast Fish farming concerns. We say that only because Tasmanians from other regions tend not the see the NW as that kind of place, and usually see the population as more pro-development. Recently, we have seen some active campaigns, starting with Robbins Island bird protection and now moving on to fish farm proposals. Its pretty impressive to fill the Stanley hall to bursting point, or to get several hundred people to a rally in Wynyard, hardly a well-recognised hotspot for ‘Greenie troublemakers’. The people attending are also pretty mainstream mums and dads, that’s new too.

What has caused this change? In 2017, the State Government released a proposal which indicated possible salmon farm expansion interest in eastern King Is, the Far North West to Rocky Cape,and extensions to Storm Bay. This was in addition to current approved aquaculture grow areas in Storm Bay, D’Entrecasteaux Channel, Mercury Passage area, Tamar, western Flinders Is, Duck River estuary (shellfish) and Macquarie Harbour.

The Premier stated in a media release “the draft Sustainable Industry Growth Plan for the Salmon Industry has been released for public input so that the entire Tasmanian community can understand our vision and priorities for the industry’s future.”

The Plan included a map of Tasmania that identifies “Grow Zones’’ and also salmon farm exclusion areas, or “No Grow Zones”.

In 2021, Fish farm protesters published maps that were claimed to reveal secret expansion plans by the Tasmanian Government



A state government spokesperson said there were no new or secret "grow" or "no grow" maps that had been developed. “The plan, which will begin development over the next 12 months, pledges that there will be no net increases in water area leased to salmon companies, and there will be a focus instead on land-based and off-shore farming, including in Commonwealth waters. [more than 3 nautical miles offshore]“[5]

It is interesting that there is no Government statement that the maps are falsified. It may be that they represent early, or speculative discussion.

The Salmonid Growers Association said the industry had no plans to expand beyond where it already existed. "The idea that the map is a prelude to salmon farms springing up all around the coastline is nonsense." They said the map was drawn back in 2017 to suggest "no go" zones, but had been misinterpreted.

[5] Tasmania's coastal waterways earmarked for salmon farming expansion plans - ABC News

Only the west (except for Macquarie Harbour), west King Island and the south coasts, are uniformly excluded from any of the published plans. It can be reasonably safely assumed that those areas have little marine farm potential, based on current technology. The maps are basically about what is theoretically workable.

Having got some strong signals that one day much of Bass Strait might be in a fish farm development area, that was enough to mobilise the locals. So far, only Petuna Seafoods have taken up the Government's offer to open up the coastline.

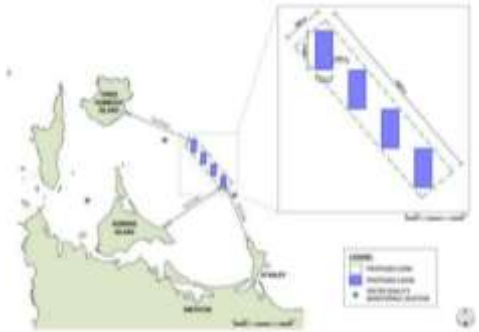
Petuna has been granted an environmental research permit for the coastal waters between Stanley and Woolnorth to assess its suitability for salmon aquaculture. This is one of the bizarre elements of the Tasmanian aquaculture planning process. It looks like someone closed their eyes and in minutes scribbled out a vast empire on a map. It includes one of the world's most important bird areas, Robbins Passage and Boullanger Bay that Marine Life Network/Tasmanians for Marine Parks has recommended for marine park listing (as well as many other important areas). If you don't care about that, why are there also areas in there where the water is up to your ankles at most states of the tide?

Petuna have since moved on to ask for a lease off Stanley. From the mapping, there has been a deliberate effort to place it in Commonwealth waters (more than 3 nautical miles (5.5km) from the coast), where to a degree, its no longer the State Government's problem.

In 2021, the State signed a non-binding MOU (memorandum of understanding) with the Commonwealth to "enable" sustainable development in their waters (Liberal Government, Sen Jonno Duniam was then the relevant Assistant Minister)6.

The visual impact of the pens has been one of the key issues. Petuna stated that "the proposal would not be visible from any coastline at sea level on mainland Tasmania or the surrounding islands." The proposed farming zone we are currently exploring is an offshore, high-energy site more than 12km from the nearest shoreline. I think the diagram is missing the usual support craft, jet black infrastructure, buoys and other activity that make it a bit more noticeable than that, but you can get some idea from a better quality photo in their brochure.

Fact-sheet-for-NW-community-August-2021.pdf (petuna.com.au)



It is a fair way out, what do you think? Thin end of the wedge? Too polluting?

*

[6] 21092718130 (nre.tas.gov.au)