



MEDIA RELEASE

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Minister Overrides Experts on Marine Farm Expansions

Environment Tasmania and the Environmental Defenders Office are deeply concerned by the shock announcement that the Minister for Primary Industries, Mr Bryan Green, has given himself power to override the Marine Farming Planning Review Panel in relation to amendments to marine farm development plans.

The *Marine Farming Planning Amendment Bill 2011*, which was passed by Labor with the support of the Liberals late last night, removes the power of the Marine Farming Planning Review Panel to refuse proposed changes to marine farm development plans. Instead, the expert Panel will now make recommendations only, with the final decision resting with the Minister.

The Bill comes days after the release of draft amendments to facilitate expansion of marine farming in Macquarie Harbour. The Bill is said to address “inconsistencies” that became apparent after the Panel refused an application for expansion of a marine farm at Soldiers Point earlier this year on grounds relating to environmental impacts.

“The purpose of this Bill is obvious – it is clearing a path of least resistance for the largest proposed expansion of marine farms in Tasmania on the doorstep of our unique, World-Heritage Macquarie Harbour,” said Environment Tasmania’s Marine Coordinator, Rebecca Hubbard.

EDO Tasmania’s lawyer, Jess Feehely, said that allowing the Minister to override a recommendation of the Panel failed to promote sustainable development and would jeopardise community involvement:

“This Bill allows the Minister to override any decision by the expert panel that amendments cannot be justified on scientific, social or economic grounds. The Minister will not be required to take community concerns into account, and no third party, including community members, tourism operators or others, can appeal against his decision.”

Rebecca Hubbard agreed that the changes could detract from the rigour of the assessment of the Macquarie Harbour proposal:

“The new *Nowhere Else on Earth* report released last week highlights that Macquarie Harbour is one of only two estuaries in Australia that have highly stratified waters and unique marine life to suit these conditions, including the endemic Endangered Maugean Skate. The Harbour and its World Heritage surrounds are the basis for a strong tourism industry, with 100,000 tourists experiencing the river cruises alone each year. Any fish farming expansion in these waters must be analysed by experts and appropriately managed, however this Bill takes away the community’s confidence that such an objective decision will be made.”

For more information:

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