

5th December 2016

Salmon Farming Proposals in Storm Bay

Yachting Tasmania recently coordinated an evening where the Tasmanian Salmonoid Growers Association (TSGA) met with board or management representatives of Southern yacht and boat clubs to outline proposed Storm Bay fish farm developments.

TSGA was represented by staff of Tassal, Petuna Aquaculture and Aquanel (Marine science consultants). Huon Aquaculture was not in attendance. (In subsequent discussion Huon advised that their absence related primarily to a bio security concern that fish farms should be two tidal zones apart – which in the case of Storm Bay is 10km- and as a consequence the company does not support the wider industry expansion in the area).

Tassal and Huon Aquaculture are well known in Southern Tasmania operating in the D'Entrecasteaux Channel, Huon, Bruny Island, Tasman Peninsular areas as well as Macquarie Harbour.

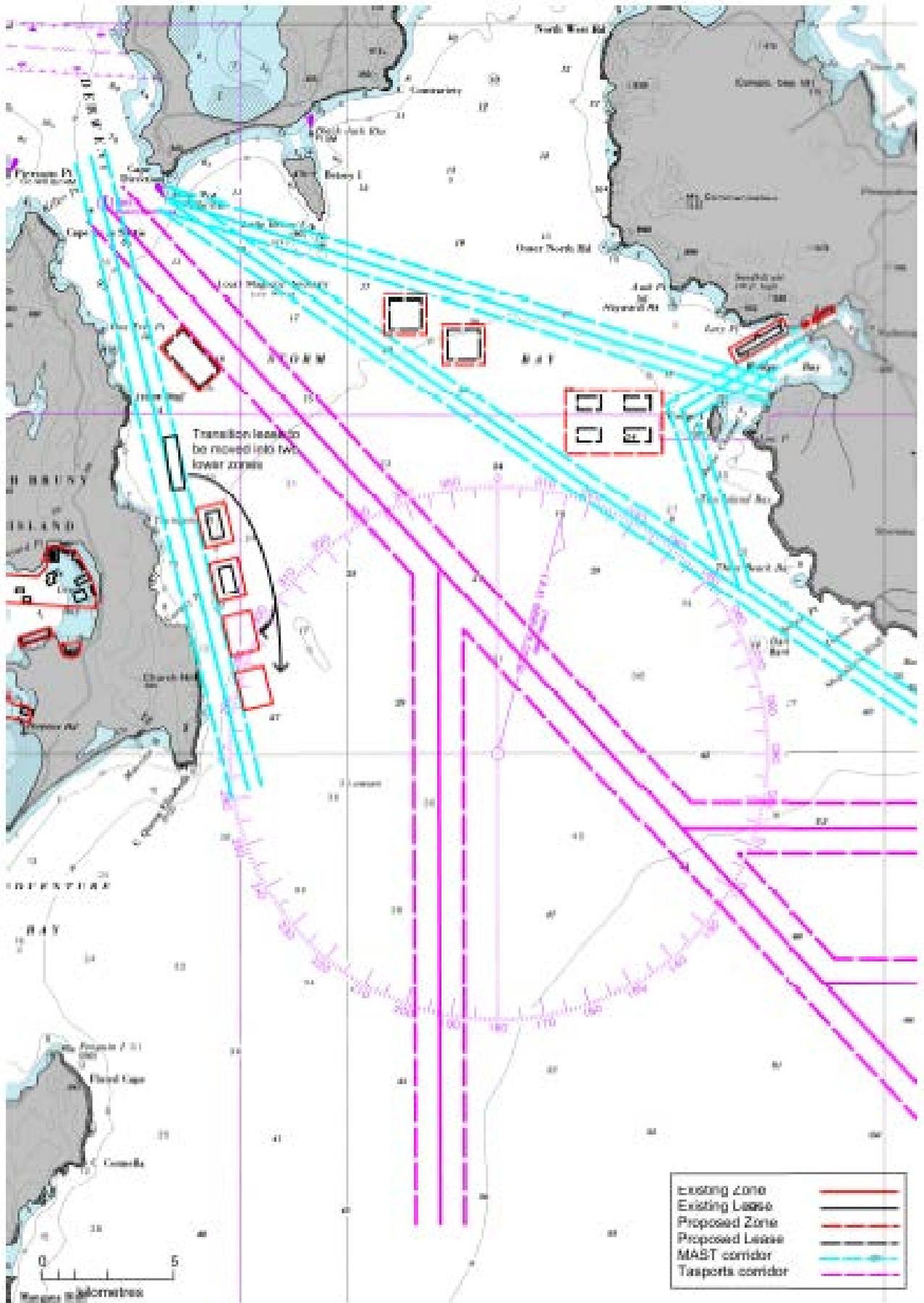
Petuna Aquaculture is a Devonport based fishing and aquaculture group that was started by Peter & Una Rockliff and is now 50% owned by Sealord Group, a NZ company controlled by the Japanese global marine products giant Nippon Suisan Kaisha Ltd (Nissui). Petuna have salmon hatcheries at Cressy and Meadowbank (the latter currently not operating) and grow out operations in Macquarie Harbour and the Tamar River (Van Diemen Aquaculture).

Storm Bay

The salmonoid industry wishes to expand and the Huon/Channel area has reached its allowable nitrogen cap while Macquarie Harbour has a similar issue that has received publicity in recent months.

In moving to Storm Bay, the industry claim they are looking to move to deeper water in 'offshore' locations. The industry would see this meeting as being part of their 'community consultation' however there was no discussion invited as to appropriateness of the expansion or locations suggested.

Subsequent to the meeting the Marine Farming Branch at DPIPWE have provided the RYCT with following chart (depth in fathoms) showing both the current and proposed lease areas in Storm Bay. (DPIPWE advise that as of 17th November the companies are still to make formal applications so the proposed lease areas may be subject to change).



Huon Aquaculture currently operate in Storm Bay on the Eastern side of Bruny Island at Trumpeter Bay and are in the process of moving this lease and expanding to 4 approved Zones of 165 ha each with a total lease area of 200ha to the south (toward Cape Queen Elizabeth) sited from 1.2 to 1.8km off the Bruny Island shore in depths of 35-45m. Huon also propose a new Zone 1.9km east of Yellow Bluff approx. 1,200 x 2,200m (260 hectares). This Zone appears to be in depths of 22-30m.

Tassal operate in Wedge Bay/Nubeena on the western side of Tasman Peninsular and propose a new Zone 1.8km west of Wedge Island which measures 2,400 x 3,600m (860 hectares) and will contain 4 lease areas of 45 ha each. Estimated depth 40-45m.

Petuna currently do not operate in Storm Bay but are proposing two Zones measuring 1,500 m by 1,600 m each (total of 440 hectares) approximately 4km south east of Betsy Island. Estimated depth 32-42m.

In summary, Huon Aquaculture has an existing Zone area of 495 hectares and the industry have proposals for additional Zone areas over a further 1,500 hectares in Storm Bay. Nearly all of the zone and lease areas are within 3 kilometres of the coast and are in relatively close proximity to rocky reef structures.

Note: Tassal advise the broader Zone area is required to facilitate ground tackle and mooring lines for the fish pens within the Lease area. Regarding vessel navigation – a vessel should be able to traverse a Zone adjacent to (but outside of) the lease boundary corner markers. Mooring lines at this point are meant to be at a depth of 5-meters and increase with distance outside of the lease. No vessel of any significant draw or size (especially under sail) should navigate within the boundary. A vessel can legally traverse within the zone area but outside of the leases which are marked by corner marks as per regulation.

While the industry describe the Storm Bay Zones as being “offshore”, the broader boating community would regard the zones as “coastal”. The industry suggest their definition is based on intensity of wave action and Storm Bay is regarded as ‘high energy’ and thus ‘offshore’. (It should be noted that there are few, if any, farming operations in the world in waters that have the potential wave intensity of Storm Bay).

‘Offshore’ Farming Technology

TSGA members acknowledged that ‘high energy’ wave action requires a change in pen technology and servicing more remote locations becomes a logistical challenge (Movement of staff, feed etc.. and salmon need to be treated with fresh water to remove gill amoeba approx. 8 times in a 15 month life cycle in the pen).

Huon Aquaculture has been public in the development of ‘fortress’ pens to operate in a tougher environment and are servicing the pens with a large ‘well boat’.

Both Tassal and Petuna say that development/purchase of pen technology is underway and they have been looking at various potential suppliers. Both suggest that ‘well boats’ are likely to be required and that other logistical issues including shore facilities, transport of staff and access to fresh water are being considered.

Tassal and Petuna are looking to late 2019 or 2020 before they have fish in the water.

Environmental

Baseline surveys commenced in 2015.

DPIPWE will establish a nitrogen cap for Storm Bay - the significance of this may be of question as nitrogen caps in other locations have been breached on occasions (eg: in 2015 Huon Aquaculture exceeded its Port Esperance plan area input by 42% or 270 tonnes).

Marine Debris - industry claim to 'minimize' and are working together in Macquarie Harbour on debris management including branding of all gear etc. so that any item is able to be identified back to operator concerned.

Debris is a very significant issue as highlighted by the MAST general manager of recreational boating in August 2016 warning that the industry needs to take responsibility before 'someone gets killed' (Mercury 13th August 2016 - <http://www.themercury.com.au/news/tasmania/warning-on-fishfarm-death-traps/news-story/4758d2b45248215cdb4fcf1bf1a7fa6>).

- In the past 6 months MAST have issued 6 'Notices to Mariners' of marine farm debris including an 85m length of 315mm diameter pipe, a 150m length of 110mm pipe, lease marker buoy, large diameter mooring ropes and a lease pen.

- There are many more anecdotal reports of debris including another farm pen at Verona Sands (Mercury 18-12-16).

- In moving to high energy offshore locations farm infrastructure will need to be larger and stronger and the risk of debris to recreational boaters is likely to increase.

Navigational

Number of discussions and suggestions included;

- Companies to consult with MAST so that marine farming lease markers may be updated in a timely manner on various nautical charts (Navionics, CMap etc.)
- Improved lighting on tow vessels where applicable to aid night navigation, and radio call initiated to inform other vessels.
- Improved communications between companies and sailing event organisers to assist vessel traffic & navigation.
- Use of other marine channels suggested – eg. Channel 7? monitored by Commercial vessels.
- Companies to maintain dual-watch marine radio channel 16 to assist in vessel safety.
- AIS beacons for farm lease corner markers, and also installed on tow vessels to aid night/low visibility navigation.

Conclusion

The broader membership of the RYCT were unable to participate in the presentation. This summary is designed for information purposes however the new lease zones referred to are proposals only so should members have any thoughts or comments with regard the proposals please provide feedback to the Club so that any items may be followed up.