

Salmon Farming in Macquarie Harbour: timeline of key events

When?	What happened?
May 2012	Amendment to the Macquarie Harbour Marine Farming Development Plan (MFDP) approved by Tasmanian Minister – amendment authorised significant expansion by all three salmon companies (from 564ha to 926ha lease area)
October 2012	Federal Minister decides approval not required under <i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999</i> , provided expansion complies with the MFDP and targeted management responses implemented where impacts exceed set thresholds. Interim biomass cap set at 15,490t (52.5% of the 29,500t maximum modelled), which was intended to operate until a review of sustainable limits in 2013.
June 2013	Federal govt grants \$7M for Macquarie Harbour Aquaculture Hub
July – October 2013	New pens installed and fish introduced to new lease areas in Macquarie Harbour
October 2014	Dissolved Oxygen Working Group notes declining DO and recommends "more detailed quantitative carbon/nitrogen/oxygen budget for Macquarie Harbour"
February 2015	Macquarie Harbour Status Report indicates improved DO in bottom waters since September 2014, but overall decline. Fish kill at Tassal lease – reported to DPIPW outside time required by licence conditions but no further action taken and details not made public (see ABC RTI decision in April 2017).
March 2015	Kim Booth MP tables leaked emails in House of Assembly between salmon companies and Minister raising concerns regarding environmental impacts and biomass capacity in Macquarie Harbour
April 2015	Tasmanian Government engages Cawthron Institute to review Macquarie Harbour data
May 2015	85,000 fish kill reported at Petuna leases
July 2015	Senate Inquiry into the Regulation of Fin-Fish Farming in Tasmania – public hearings To read submissions to the inquiry, click here .
21 August 2015	Senate Inquiry into the Regulation of Fin-Fish Farming in Tasmania – Final Report Cawthron Institute report released. Report confirms decline in DO coincident with increase in biomass, and notes that any further expansion should "proceed in a cautious manner".
September 2015	Tasmanian Government response to Cawthron Institute report
April 2016	Macquarie Harbour Status Update report . Report refers to research independently commissioned by Huon Aquaculture recommending that poor DO levels be mitigated through oxygenating cages, restricted feed times and minimising stocking densities (see FRDC report below) DPIPWE announce proposed 21,500t biomass cap for 2016-2017
June 2016	Tasmanian Government announces intention to amend salmon farming regulations to transfer environmental monitoring and enforcement responsibilities to the EPA Director. FRDC report, Identifying the nature, extent and duration of critical production periods for Atlantic salmon in Macquarie Harbour, Tasmania, during summer
1 July 2016	EPA Director takes on responsibility for environmental regulation of salmon farming

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August 2016	Amendment to MFDP to allow EPA Director to set biomass cap , and apportion biomass between leaseholders.
September 2016	First EPA Lease Boundary Compliance summary report released – shows non-compliance at 19 leases in relation to <i>Beggiatoa</i>
October 2016	ABC Four Corners investigation, Big Fish , televised.
November 2016	Draft determination released , proposing 14,000t biomass cap
January 2017	Final determination released imposing a 14,000t biomass cap from 14 February 2017 – 30 April 2017 Tassal ordered to destock Franklin lease (site 266) by 1 March 2017 IMAS Technical Report and Lease Boundary Compliance Summary released to leaseholders. Reports show concerns re impacts on World Heritage area.
6 February 2017	Huon launch legal proceedings in the Supreme Court and Federal Court challenging management decisions in Macquarie Harbour.
9 February 2017	Allegation that Tassal influenced a witness at the 2015 Senate Inquiry referred to Senate Privileges Committee – no reporting date set
17 February 2017	Minister announces details of proposed changes to regulation, and plans to develop Sustainable Salmon Industry Growth Plan. The Plan is expected to provide support for oceanic, rather than estuarine, expansion.
22 February 2017	Tassal join Supreme and Federal Court proceedings in support of EPA Director.
24 February 2017	Tassal granted extension to 15 April 2017 to destock Franklin lease (266)
February 2017	Australian Ethical divests shares in Tassal, citing concerns re sustainability of Macquarie Harbour operations
14 March 2017	ABC releases underwater footage allegedly showing <i>Beggiatoa</i> mats and “dead zone” within the World Heritage Area
16 March 2017	Petuna calls for lease-by-lease biomass management
10 April 2017	Tassal completes de-stocking of Franklin lease (site 266)
20 April 2017	Ombudsman decision releases emails confirming fish kill on Tassal leases in February 2015. Govt had refused RTI application on basis of potential competitive disadvantage. The disclosed information was released to the public on 2 May 2017
24 April 2017	Tassal announces results showing recovery at Franklin lease and calls for greater transparency and an “ industry-funded watchdog ” to regulate salmon farming. Results submitted to EPA, but not publicly released .
27 April 2017	Tassal reveals 14,000t biomass cap will exceeded until December 2017, based on volume of fish already in the water in Macquarie Harbour. Tassal say they are working with the EPA on “mitigation measures”, including dredging underneath pens. Federal Court case management hearing Petuna and Tassal formally joined to proceedings, given to 1 June 2017 to file material.
May 2017	Position Paper on Regulatory Changes released – legislative changes intended to be introduced in May 2017 deferred to August 2017 (to coincide with release of Sustainable Salmon Industry Growth Plan). Updated FAQ information sheet also released.

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May 2017	<p>Macquarie Harbour TWWHA Status Report released.</p> <p>Report confirms deterioration in in-fauna abundance and number of species at a range of monitoring sites within the TWWHA area (39, 42 and 43), and that industry monitoring at the Franklin lease indicated <i>Beggiatoa</i> has contracted to well outside of the TWWHA boundary.</p>
3 May 2017	<p>Tassal reveal plans to undertake a trial of technology to “vacuum” up / dredge waste at Franklin lease – draft proposal submitted to EPA</p> <p>Huon Aquaculture announce intention to seek injunction to prevent trial, raising concern re re-suspension of nutrients</p> <p>EPA Director announces that trial has not been approved, will require Environmental Effects Report and assessment by the EPA Board.</p>
5 May 2017	<p>EPA Director releases draft determination reducing biomass cap to 12,000t from 1 June 2017 – 31 May 2018 (or 13t/ha). The decision follows an IMAS report showing the harbour is “under a level of stress that may not be sustainable in the long term”.</p> <p>The draft Determination allows companies to exceed the cap by up to 15t/ha (28t/ha in total), provided “approved waste collection system” implemented. Tassal will trial an experimental waste collection system, that must be approved for further use. If the system is not approved, Tassal will be required to remove fish in excess of its 13t/ha cap.</p> <p>The EPA Director also confirmed that the government intends to move from Harbour-wide management to lease-by-lease management.</p> <p>Macquarie Harbour Nutrient Review 2013-2016 released. Review shows “harbour wide increase in [dissolved reactive phosphorous] with the most significant elevation in DRP occurring in the bottom waters in both the Northern Harbour and WHA sites.”</p>
23 May 2017	<p>Huon Aquaculture’s submissions in response to draft determination raise strong concerns about overall cap (recommending 10,000t), likely ineffectiveness of waste collection systems, and the appropriateness of trialling unproven systems in an already compromised environment.</p>
25 May 2017	<p>Tasmanian Budget 2017-18 allocates \$500,000 per year for salmon aquaculture regulation, “to be funded by Industry”</p>
31 May 2017	<p>EPA Director released final Determination confirming 2017-2018 biomass cap of 12,036t (13t/ha).</p> <p>As flagged in his draft determination, the Director will allow Tassal to exceed its allocated cap and stock up to 28t/hectare (about 4,000 extra tonnes), provided an “approved waste capture system” is installed. Tassal’s Franklin lease is to remain fallow (i.e. not stocked) until further notice.</p> <p>Guidelines for approved waste capture systems released.</p> <p>Tassal receives approval to trial five waste collection units during June 2017, with all waste collected to be taken ashore and treated prior to disposal.</p> <p>Huon Aquaculture announced that they will continue their legal challenge to the proposed biomass cap, including the additional allowances, and called on the EPA to require Tassal to bring forward harvesting.</p>

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6 June 2017	<p>Huon Aquaculture commences Federal Court proceedings seeking a declaration that Tassal is in breach of the revised biomass cap.</p> <p>EPA Director subsequently revised and reissued the biomass determination to clarify how Tassal's allocation was calculated.</p> <p>EPA Director grants Tassal approval for a waste capture trial (allowing an additional quota of approximately 4,200t).</p>
30 June 2017	<p>EPA Director releases waste capture trial results</p> <p>EPA Director issues an Environment Protection Notice, Environment Management Plan and approving Tassal's ongoing waste capture system.</p>
July 2017	<p>Draft <i>Finfish Farming Environmental Regulation Bill 2017</i> to transfer responsibility to the EPA released for public comment.</p>
August 2017	<p>Draft <i>Sustainable Industry Growth Plan for the Salmon Industry</i> released for public comment. Draft Plan proposes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • creating a Finfish Farming (Compliance and Monitoring) Unit in the EPA • new agreement between salmon companies concerning the future of farming in Macquarie Harbour (to replace the existing Area Management Agreement) • greater public access to environmental monitoring data <p>The <i>Finfish Farming Environmental Regulation Bill 2017</i> introduced to Parliament.</p>
September 2017	<p>Compliance monitoring (benthic monitoring) released showing no significant change in compliance status across the Harbour. IMAS monitoring showed some faunal recovery and a reduced range of bacterial matting, but noted oxygen levels remained very low and could potentially return to critically low levels."</p>
28 September 2017	<p>Tassal referred proposal to dispose of waste captured from Macquarie Harbour pens to Kelly Channel (at the mouth of the Harbour) to the Federal Minister for assessment under the EPBC Act.</p> <p><i>Finfish Farming Environmental Regulation Act 2017</i> passed</p>
3 October 2017	<p>EPA Director grants approval for Tassal to treat waste captured from Macquarie Harbour pens on board the MV Wallaby.</p>
7 November 2017	<p>Tassal applies for approval to dispose treated liquid fish farm waste from its Macquarie Harbour waste capture via a TasWater wastewater treatment plant at Pardoe.</p>
13 November 2017	<p>EPA approves Pardoe disposal plan.</p>
14 November 2017	<p>Tassal abandons proposal to dispose of waste at Kelly Channel and withdraws EPBC Act referral.</p>

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16 November 2017	Huon Aquaculture Federal Court challenge hearings commence. Due to late circulation of relevant documents, hearings adjourned to March 2018.
20 November 2017	EPA Director approves amendments to the EMP for on-board waste treatment to add disinfection and an activated sludge process.
27 November 2017	EPA confirms significant fish mortalities reported by all three companies. Petuna Seafoods lost approximately 3 per cent of smolt stock, Huon Aquaculture lost fish from one trout pen. Tassal did not confirm the extent of its losses.
4 December 2017	Finfish Farming Environmental Regulation Act 2017 commences
6-8 December 2017	Final Sustainable Industry Growth Plan for the Salmon Industry declared. <i>Blue Future</i> Aquaculture conference held at IMAS.
21 February 2018	EPA and DPIPWE successfully apply to cease to be parties to the Huon Aquaculture Federal Court proceeding.
19-26 March 2018	Federal Court hearing in <i>Huon Aquaculture Group Ltd and Others v Minister for the Environment and Others</i>
21 March 2018	IMAS report on the health of Macquarie Harbour (based on monitoring data up to January 2018) confirms very low levels of dissolved oxygen in mid-bottom waters continued during Spring 2017 and a decline in benthic faunal abundance, including within the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area.
23 March 2018	EPA Director announces that he believes the scientific modelling relied upon to support the 2012 expansion of salmon farming in Macquarie Harbour was " flat wrong ", and has provided a draft determination to the companies proposing reducing the biomass cap to 9,000t.
29 May 2018	EPA Director sets the 2018-2020 biomass limit for Macquarie Harbour at 9,500t (or 10.26t/ha), and stocking density at 15kg/m ³ . All leases, including the fallowed Franklin lease, used to calculate total biomass.
2 July 2018	IMAS report on environmental condition of Macquarie Harbour (based on monitoring data up to June 2018) shows improved DO levels in middle and bottom waters of the harbour, but little change from the low levels of faunal abundance and numbers of benthic species recorded in deeper areas.
6 July 2018	Federal Court dismisses Huon Aquaculture's application to invalidate the Commonwealth Minister's 2012 decision regarding expansion.

Updated 10 July 2018

This timeline has been compiled from publicly available documents and published court material. While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, there may be things we've missed. Please let us know if you spot any errors and we'll endeavour to correct the timelines.