

# Huon's biosecurity explained



Biosecurity—we've all heard the term but what does it practically mean for the industry we operate within, and indeed the broader aquaculture and seafood industries in Tasmania?

It's fair to say that people working in our industry, finfish farming, have recognised that a robust biosecurity program, capable of being implemented in practice, is critical to the future not only to our industry, but all primary industries, our communities and the environments in which we farm. For others, less directly involved in the industry, what does it all mean?

While Tasmania is fortunate to be free of many of the serious diseases which effect salmon overseas we do experience the challenges of certain pathogens but, importantly, these can be managed using good biosecurity.

With the new Biosecurity Act in place, the hard work for the salmon industry now begins to finalise the next state-wide biosecurity program to underpin sustainable industry management and growth. Huon Aquaculture firmly supports the need for improved biosecurity of all salmon farms in Tasmania as a sound basis for future expansion of the industry.

Not only does a sound biosecurity strategy deliver better outcomes for the industry, it also maintains and enhances sustainable growth and export market opportunities. International experience has shown that biosecurity is a critical business risk for salmonid growers – the 2007 collapse in the Chilean salmonid industry was triggered by a biosecurity event and resulted in a 90 per cent reduction in the employment across the sector. Examples such as this demonstrate that the risks are real, and the stakes are high which is why proactively and collectively managing biosecurity risk is vital to future growth and sustainability of this industry in Tasmania.

At Huon, the foundation of biosecurity is maintaining the fish in our care in good health. Our facilities, whether on land or at sea, are designed to do just this. The management of the animals and the handling processes employed are designed for the different life stages of salmon and competently utilised so as not to be harmful to the stock. The feed provided meets the essential nutritional needs of the fish. By ensuring healthy robust stocks, biosecurity risk can be directly reduced.

In addition, we have risk mitigation measures in place to address the routes of entry of biosecurity risk organisms onto farms, within farms and off farms. For Tasmania, and the salmon industry, this translates into a range of best-practice actions including:

- Year class and smolt class separation (by an epidemiologically meaningful distance); at Huon we have never mixed our year classes plus we hold our smolt firstly in the relative in-shore shelter of the Huon River, followed by a period of grow-out in the semi-exposed D'Entrecasteaux Channel. In Storm Bay we hold the smolt at our new East of Yellow Bluff lease then move them to other leases in Storm Bay for grow-out.
- Adequate fallowing of lease areas; at Huon we have always fallowed sites to ensure good benthic recovery. We're also focussed on growing fish larger on land at our Whale Point nursery to reduce the time required to grow at sea and to provide increased fallowing opportunities.

- Area-specific equipment and infrastructure; at Huon we have measures to keep equipment in their relevant farming zone and if it is moved, it is thoroughly cleaned, disinfected and inspected.
- Removal of mortalities as frequently as possible from all pens; at Huon, the design of our Fortress Pens enables mortalities to be retrieved daily, where weather permits.
- Best-practice harvest procedures; at Huon with the arrival of our new well-boat, the Ronja Storm, all harvest water will be returned to the boat so as not to infect other fish in the area.
- Good stocking densities and appropriate fish population sizes; at Huon we have embraced good epidemiological principles by maintaining stocking density of 1% fish to 99% water.
- Improved management of fish movements; at Huon we recognise that linkages between sites (e.g. boat movements, towing etc) need to be minimised which is why we only use our closed valve well-boat for moving fish.
- Continued commitment to best practice fish health practices including vaccination; at Huon all our fish are vaccinated with commercially available vaccines before leaving the hatchery. Huon also strongly supports the extensive industry, DPIPWE and FRDC efforts to improve vaccine effectiveness and develop new vaccines.

At Huon Aquaculture, we take biosecurity very seriously, and our actions over many years demonstrate the company's commitment to protect the environment in which we farm. Biosecurity is not only a matter of good hygiene and disinfection procedures but also requires that fish have optimal nutrition, live in high quality water and avoid stress. All these factors have contributed to our salmon being less susceptible to disease and infection; evidenced by our zero use of antibiotics in a marine environment since 2016, and being named the 2013 Australian Biosecurity (animal) Farmer of the Year; the first aquaculture company to receive this prestigious award. We were also the first salmon farmer to be awarded Australian Farmer of the Year in 2018. With a continued focus on biosecurity across the industry, we hope we won't be the only aquaculture company to receive these awards.

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