

Because I am limited to a 3 minute presentation please excuse me reading direct from my notes, and thank you for this opportunity to speak.

My name is Geoffrey Swan, and since July 2008 together with my wife Irene, we have lived in Lonnvale – which is 30 minutes inland from Huonville.

Our 5 acre property borders the Russell River and is situated 3km downstream from the Huon Aquaculture Hatchery which is also on the Russell.

Since 2009 I have been making representation on behalf of some 35 individuals in the Lonnvale community, most of whom have requested anonymity for fear of reprisals, or because they a connection with the Aquaculture Industry.

My submission is also supported by Mr Richard Dax a well regarded personality in the Tasmanian fishing and tourism sector, and someone who has fished up and down the Russell River for some 30 years.

My written submission to the Senate Inquiry has detailed an ongoing 8 year chronology of the pollution issue in our river.

As recent as December 2014 the EPA advised me they now need to tread carefully given HAC are now a large publically listed company with immense resources.

The Russell River is an upland stream carrying pristine mountain water from the snow melt on the nearby Snowy Range. Upstream from the Hatchery live only two families deep in the forest, and not alongside the river. Directly across from the Hatchery is the Rivers Edge Wilderness Camping ground which was established in 2011.

Downstream from the Hatchery towards our property is cleared and dormant farming land, a rental house once belonging to Gunns Limited, and then our property.

Since 2008 there has categorically been no farming on the land, no use of agricultural sprays or fertilisers, and in the past 8 years Gunns have not sprayed their small plantation or fertilised their trees.

For more than 100 years the Russell River has provided the Lonnvale community with all their household water, farm water, has been a playground for children and tourists, and has historically been acknowledged as one of the best trout fishing rivers in Tasmania.

In January 2006 an existing small hobby fish farm was acquired by Mr Peter Bender and the Huon Aquaculture Company then proceeded to build a multi-million dollar hatchery. This hatchery includes an undercover recirculating system to grow out their fingerlings, and an antiquated outdoor Flow Through system for their brood fish.

Pristine oxygen rich water from the Russell River is channelled into the outdoor clay ponds picking up the fish faeces and waste, any undigested fish feed and fish feed in suspension. This is then discharged further downstream back into the river.

Every day of the year 26 million litres of this effluent water (that is 11 Olympic swimming pools) is discharged into the Russell River. At times of the year the total river volume is recorded as 26 million litres.

In March 2007 an Environmental Protection Notice was served by the Huon Valley Council on Huon Aquaculture to address the issues of water quality being discharged from the flow through system. An Environmental Infringement notice followed.

In January 2008 the Huon Valley Council reported that HAC were still not compliant with the EPN,¹ and in March 2008 the Environment Department assumed control of the facility. The EPA advised HVC, Budget Estimates and the media they would be issuing another EPN.

For some unexplained reason another EPN was not issued.

The Russell River downstream of the discharge has year round brown slippery slime and long green algae. There is strong anecdotal evidence of decreased fish life, platypus and the once common fresh water rat.

Upstream from the Hatchery the river remains pristine and fish life is abundant. I have consistent photographic evidence recorded over the years to support this.

The Flow Through System has been banned in some parts of the world. Inland Fisheries Service and the EPA have both stated this system is no longer considered best practice.

Director Wes Ford stated on ABC Australia Wide on the weekend that future hatcheries may be banned from using the Tasmanian waterways and be required to use recirculating systems.

There is no logical reason why the existing flow through system in Lonnvale cannot be relocated into a recirculating system – immediately.

This would put an end to 8 years of pollution issues to the Russell River.

In September 2014 the EPA finally served an EPN on HAC. The nutrient levels however were above any previously recorded level, and were even higher than those in the 2007 EPN issued by HVC.

In April this year I observed and recorded algae almost as bad as it was back in 2008 and 2009.

HAC staff undertake their own water testing for the EPA. It is not independent.

Requests to view these test results are denied by both HAC and the EPA, citing commercial in confidence. Two requests via RTI have failed to allow access to the 2009 ecological report prepared by Professor Peter Davies.

The long term impact on the river and the people of Lonnvale is unknown. We can only look to overseas examples where waterways are being destroyed because of inadequate Aquaculture practices.

Despite there being an EPN in place, Mr Peter Bender wrote to me in November 2014 suggesting the pollution is because of agriculture, forestry, the camping ground and septic tanks not working properly.

Director Ford also incorrectly referenced agriculture and forestry on the ABC program on the weekend.

Six months ago the EPA served a second EPN requiring HAC to repair their leaking clay ponds before July 20th 2015.

As of today this has not been completed but I was assured last week it will be done in the next 4 business days.

An identical pollution situation is occurring on the Little Denison River downstream of the Snowy Range Hatchery. The EPA tested this river water 13th May 2015 and an EPN is currently in draft form.

As a resident of Lonnavale I have been denied access to these test results even though on this occasion the EPA did the testing. Director Ford advised me last week that I need to formally submit an RTI request.

The Snowy Range Hatchery is currently listed for sale as a "lifestyle business". The asking price is \$3 million. An EPN is being served because of their impact on the river. The EPA has also advised me it is not their position to notify the real estate agent of the pending EPN.

We are not against the Aquaculture Industry.

This is not just about what is happening to us here in Lonnavale, but what does it mean for the Tasmania we want to live in, and the values that we are projecting to the world.

The Russell River cannot continue to be destroyed all because a now large public company is in pursuit of increased profits for its shareholders.

I again confirm I have available considerable documentation, reports, photographs and information obtained through FOI and RTI should the committee require more information.

Geoffrey Swan