

Salmon Farm Relocation notes (being notes for my oral presentation to the Advisory Panel)  
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Presentation:

I would like to first address statements in the government's summary consultation document.

1. "Relocation is being considered as a way to:"
  - "ensure the outcomes from salmon farming are improved through implementation of benthic best management practice."

Comment: It is my understanding that benthic best management practice has been developed for slow flow sites, and do not necessarily apply to fast flow sites, for which new best management practices may need to be developed. This proposal seeks a change of location for farms that are presently failing to meet benthic best management practice as the means to meet that standard, while at the same time forecasting an increase in feed from 5,700 tonnes per year to 25,000 tonnes. If King Salmon were presently complying with benthic best management practice, the community might have more confidence in the proposed expansion. As it is, there is a significant risk that we will see a five-fold expansion in polluting effects.

- "potentially improve the social and cultural outcomes from salmon farming by creating jobs, and moving salmon farms away from areas of high competing use."

Comment: Jobs are going to be the big driver in this proposal, as all the supposed environmental improvements sound good but have no real basis in reality. "It sounds good if you say it fast." Who can argue against more jobs? The big question is how the economic benefits measure up against the environmental damage, which if "clean and green" still has any currency in our overseas tourism capital must have an economic value as well. How many tourism jobs are at risk from media reports that blue-green algae is killing remaining fish stocks, along with flow-on effects upon seabirds and marine mammals? We don't know, but we are inclined to take a precautionary approach, particularly given the poor environmental record salmon farming in the Sounds has earned. As far as "moving salmon farms away from areas of high competing use" is concerned, this proposal would appear to achieve the opposite. The Board of Inquiry noted that it is just as well that they are out of the way (of Pelorus Entrance), whereas this proposal seeks to relocate them more "in the way".

- "maintain or increase the economic benefits from salmon farming"  
Comment: This is merely a redundancy of the previous point. As I have indicated above, we can all agree that economic benefits can be beneficial, except when there are environmental or other costs that are not taken into account.

“This proposal..[is]...about getting better outcomes from the same amount of space.” Comment: Strictly speaking, this proposal is about increasing production in the same amount of space. It does not follow that, if you consider environmental effects, it is a better outcome. An increase in production will necessarily come at the cost of an increase in benthic effects and effects upon the water column, and if these are distributed over a wider area, we may simply end up with a larger, or even more concentrated footprint than that currently produced on the existing slow flow sites.

“This proposal...is consistent with the Business Growth Agenda aim to increase the productivity of natural resources while reducing environmental effects.” I am sounding like a broken record here, but this proposal shows every indication that it will increase, rather than reduce environmental effects.

“Relocating up to six farms to more suitable locations expected to result in:...”

- “improved environmental monitoring and adaptive management”

Comment: It is not explained how relocating these farms will improve management practices. Best management practices are supposed to already be in place. I believe MPI and New Zealand King Salmon have the cart before the horse. Comply with best practice first, *then* seek community approval for expansion.

This proposal reflects values that have served to raise the standard of living in New Zealand (and the rest of the developed world) (and provided we are measuring in purely economic terms) for the past 150 years. It reflects a world view that sees economic growth as the key to prosperity. Western society has been doing it this way for so long, and with so much apparent benefit, that in the absence of any reliable alternative, we are going to keep doing it, even though it carries an indisputable environmental cost. (The social costs of this world view are not pertinent to the discussion at hand, but these also need to be addressed in another place.) An example that points to an emerging consciousness that is more inclusive of the environment, is the value of Tesla, the electric car maker, whose value has just surpassed that of General Motors, making it now the most valuable car maker in the United States. This, after failing, so far, to make a profit. Why can we not have a salmon industry that seeks first and foremost to achieve environmental brilliance? With the fourth largest maritime territory in the world, we should be farming salmon off-shore, where measurable environmental effects can be reduced to practically zero. This will at least buy us a little time. As it is, we have a proposal by MPI on behalf of an aquaculture company that has already established a track record of environmental degradation, to take the cheap option of relocating under-performing farms into faster flow areas, *so that production can be increased!* It is not an encouraging sign.

In keeping with the views I have expressed above, I would like to draw the attention of the Advisory Panel to an article (the Capitalocene, by Benjamin Kunkel) recently published in the London Review of Books, in which he reviews three books concerned with the identification and dynamics of a new epoch in the earth's history that has been brought about by the activities of mankind. One concept that is pertinent to the present discussion is the tendency for modern agriculture to withdraw more nutrient from the soil than it replaces (and which can appropriately be applied to aquaculture:

“Prompted by Marx’s critique of the unsustainable metabolism (*Stoffwechsel*) by which capitalist agriculture extracts from the soil more nutrients than it replaces, Bellamy Foster offered the all-purpose concept of a ‘metabolic rift’ between capitalist humanity and nature: the compulsion to accumulate ever more capital rules out the metabolic equilibrium that would allow a society to maintain indefinitely the environment from which it indefinitely takes its livelihood.”

There are also comments in this article about Cheap Nature (the maximising of profits taken from the use of resources not paid for). Which reminds us that salmon farming in the Marlborough Sounds is an activity that degrades an environment that does not belong to the salmon farming businesses, but to the people. We are not amused that MPI is proposing to further degrade our natural environment in order that a private company may make a bigger profit. Perhaps it is time the Marlborough Sounds were given a legal identity, as the Whanganui River has recently received, that would protect it from exploitation?

Also in the LRB article:

“Moore’s fourth and last barrier to a perpetually increasing ecological surplus – and ‘arguably the most cumulatively significant’ – is degradation of the biosphere through carbon emissions, soil degradation, biodiversity loss, chemical toxicity and so on. A sufficiently tattered web of life will yield ‘negative value’ rather than any positive plenty: no application of capital or labour, in any amount, will be able to produce anything but goods of generally inferior quality and quantity. Capitalism would then have finally destroyed the natural preconditions for continually rising labour productivity and endless capital accumulation, never mind the welfare of noncapitalist humans and other bystander organisms.”

While this article from the LRB is concerned with a broader issue than that before us here, it is pertinent in describing how a capitalistic view of the world shapes our values concerning the environment, with the result of inevitable environmental destruction. The article can be read in full at:

<<https://www.lrb.co.uk/v39/no5/benjamin-kunkel/the-capitalocene>>

I also wish to draw your attention to another book review, this by George Monbiot, on the book Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think like a 21<sup>st</sup>

Century Economist by Kate Raworth of Oxford University Environmental Change Institute.

Raworth points out that economics in the 20th century “lost the desire to articulate its goals”. It aspired to be a science of human behaviour: a science based on a deeply flawed portrait of humanity. The dominant model – “rational economic man”, self-interested, isolated, calculating – says more about the nature of economists than it does about other humans. The loss of an explicit objective allowed the discipline to be captured by a proxy goal: endless growth.”

“The aim of economic activity, she argues, should be “meeting the needs of all within the means of the planet”. Instead of economies that need to grow, whether or not they make us thrive, we need economies that “make us thrive, whether or not they grow”. This means changing our picture of what the economy is and how it works.”

Mainstream economics generally concerns itself with factors that can be valued by the market, leaving out a broad range of activities and assets that do not lend themselves to monetary measurement: “energy, materials, the natural world, human society, power, the wealth we hold in common...”

Raworth proposes a new model which includes all the things we value for quality of life, as well as those things that detract from it. George Monbiot’s review can be found at:

<<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/apr/12/doughnut-growth-economics-book-economic-model>>

These articles can provide some valuable perspective on the fraught issue of what is commonly perceived as ‘development versus environmental sustainability’. We would do very well not to repeat the mistakes of the past, in which the natural world was viewed as a commodity to be exploited. It is, perhaps alongside human potential, our greatest unrealised asset.

On a final note, I wish to commend Ngati Kuia for invoking Kaikaiawaro, the spirit of guidance and protection in our consideration of this proposal. I have no problem with the recognition of a presence, or whatever other descriptive one might use, that is beyond our very limited experience in this day and age of gross materialism. It is so easy to assume that our western market-oriented way of life is the best, even if this requires a deliberate ignorance of the great and seemingly insoluble failures of modern society. Good on Ngati Koata for presenting another view.