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Tassal announces plans off-shore, not off-mission

Tassal believes it is time for bold moves to retire in-shore leases and transition to oceanic farming environments, where it makes social, environmental and operational sense to do so.

Tassal will be the first Tasmanian salmon farming company to commence the phased retirement of in-shore farms in line with its strategy to future farm in more oceanic environments further off-shore.

The company has announced today its plans to retire one of its largest commercial leases in the channel at Tinderbox, as well as a farm in the Huon region, known as Brabazon Park as soon as its proposed Storm Bay farm comes on line and Tassal commences farming there.

Tassal managing director and chief executive Mark Ryan said the company had committed to research and development over the past six years to support safe operations in some of the wildest conditions farmed globally, and said it was timely to commence the transitional process towards future off-shore farming in 2018, a decision he said was about smarter and more responsible farming.

"As a company, we have experienced highs and lows that come with an evolving industry. We have reflected deeply on Macquarie Harbour. We humbly accept the lessons learned," he said.

"Our commitment to Tasmania is to move forward with learnings, listening to our stakeholders and consulting on responsible and sustainable salmon farming for all current and future leases. It is our intention to meet and talk with all key stakeholders and the Tasmanian community in coming weeks to ensure we can move forward with a shared vision.

"Today's announcement is the first step to achieving that vision and it is crystal clear a move to off-shore, oceanic farming is sensible and meets community expectations. We will phase out of some in-shore leases where it makes social, environmental and practical operational sense, as new oceanic farming opportunities are presented and realised. We will commence this process immediately, identifying Tinderbox and Brabazon Park in the Channel and Huon region for retirement, once the proposed Storm Bay farm becomes operational," he said.

"This will not have an impact on jobs in any region as our oceanic farming growth plans present net employment benefits, whilst supporting responsible and sustainable farming

for the future. Our existing regions and farms are incredibly important to us and our employees, and therefore, a decision to retire Tinderbox and Brabazon Park farms was done after completing a very rigorous and robust process of consultation, and environmental and operational considerations.

"Furthermore, we will continue to invest in our eco-aquaculture programs around the state, including earmarked sites in the channel region where it makes sense to farm kelp, instead of salmon, to rejuvenate the region and provide environmental benefits which provide other aquaculture and fisheries activities a healthier environment."

Mr Ryan said Tassal's two salmon farms off Bruny Island, Simpson Bay and North Simpson Bay, would be invested in for eco-aquaculture programs for environmental benefits rather than any future salmon farming.

"We would like to work with local tourism operators to enhance the eco-aqua tourism experience in the Bruny Island precinct. This includes transforming these farms to provide a reef experience," he said.

Mr Ryan said Tassal will also continue its work with local councils to offer, where it is useful, infrastructure for shared use or which can be converted into a social asset – for example, a mooring and picnic area or recreational jetty.

"We recognise the right way forward to achieve a responsible, sustainable industry is not about simply adding in more pens, it is about smarter, more responsible farming, which will deliver greater benefits for communities, the environment and our business."

Tassal anticipates the Storm Bay plans to be announced for public consultation this weekend and says this process follows more than six years of research and development and over three years of community consultation regarding the proposed oceanic site at West of Wedge Island.

"Our Storm Bay farm will be the highest energy, furthest from shore, salmon farm ever operated in Tasmania and perhaps, the world," Mr Ryan said.

"A great amount of research and engineering has been underway to support the development of required infrastructure; including cages, nets, barges and moorings – all which require specific design for this site and many of our people have spent considerable time overseas to ensure the safe development of infrastructure. This has included a significant infrastructure solution to manage seals on sites through the most advanced seal-proof sanctuary pens available. We understand the Tasmanian Government's priority to cease seal relocations and have accelerated our investment program to ensure our sanctuary pens are in place as quickly as possible."

The proposed off-shore Storm Bay site will comprise a combination of new and exciting vessels and equipment, fuelling local supplier trade, as well as generating new jobs for 70 full time equivalent employees in the Tasman area.

The company will be engaging with the community and all stakeholders and hosting a number of public information sessions.

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