



Petition of Clive Edward Barker: Legislation to allow commercial trout farming

Report of the Primary Production Committee

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Contents

Recommendation.....	2
Request that Parliament review present legislation on trout farming	2
Trout farming is banned under current legislation.....	2
Petitioner's comments.....	2
Comments from other submitters	3
Comments from the Department of Conservation	4
Comments from the Ministry for Primary Industries	6
Our response to the petition	6
Appendix.....	8

Barbara Kuriger
Chairperson

Petition of Clive Edward Barker: Legislation to allow commercial trout farming

Recommendation

The Primary Production Committee has considered the petition of Clive Edward Barker—Legislation to allow commercial trout farming—and recommends that the Government give serious consideration to commercialising trout farming.

Request that Parliament review present legislation on trout farming

The petition was presented to the House on 16 May 2018. It requests:

That Parliament review present legislation on trout farming.

Trout farming is banned under current legislation

Commercial farming of trout, and selling wild-caught trout, are both prohibited by the Conservation Act 1987 and the Fisheries Act 1996. In addition, the Customs Import Prohibition (Trout) Order 2018 restricts the importation of trout for sale.

Petitioner's comments

The petitioner maintains that allowing the commercial farming and sale of trout would have the following benefits for New Zealand. It would:

- provide employment in rural areas
- build sustainable economic activity and exports
- provide a secure food source
- relieve the pressure on depleting fish stocks.

The petitioner believes that the ban on trout farming is not justified by the science nor by the experience of the New Zealand salmon farming industry. We heard that Mr Barker successfully farmed salmon for many years. During this time he witnessed no destruction to the natural environment, depletion of wild fish stocks, or the introduction of new fish diseases.

Trout farming would provide a secure food source

The petitioner explained that fish stocks are rapidly depleting but fish consumption is on the rise. We heard that the demand for protein-rich foods continues to rise as the population grows. Fish is a good source of protein and aquaculture could provide fish for future generations. It would also reduce pressure on wild fish stocks. Mr Barker suggested that allowing trout farming would also build on New Zealand's reputation as a supplier of quality foods.

Economic and employment benefits

Mr Barker emphasised the economic and employment benefits of trout farming. He thinks that New Zealand could produce high-quality, high-value trout products. He suggested that the sale of fresh trout in restaurants would support the tourism industry. Also, the exportation and sale of smoked trout would bring further benefits to the New Zealand economy. He said trout farming would boost the rural economy and provide jobs in small communities.

Comments from other submitters

Various iwi support this petition

Ngati Pikiāo submitted in support of this petition. Ngati Pikiāo maintain that trout farming would provide jobs in rural areas. They also said “trout farming offers the opportunity for our Rangatahi (youth) to become more devoted to being kaitiaki or guardian of our taiao, our natural environment”. Other iwi groups who submitted in support of this petition include: Ngati Ruapani Ki Waikaremoana, Ngati Tuwharetoa Fisheries Charitable Trust, Tumu te Heuheu, and the Tuwharetoa Maori Trust Board. These groups support the petitioner’s reasons for legalising the commercial farming and sale of trout and emphasised the potential economic and employment benefits that trout farming would offer.

Trout New Zealand

Trout New Zealand is a forum established to provide interested people with a place to voice their opinions about trout farming. The forum, is supported by the Regional Aquaculture organisation. Trout New Zealand supports this petition and agrees that trout farming would benefit New Zealand. It would provide food security, employment, and revenue from the export of a high-quality product. It said that the risk of poaching would be manageable as it is easy to discern between wild trout and farmed trout because the flesh of farmed trout is noticeably more pink. We note that the Department of Conservation does not agree that this is the case and thinks it would be more difficult to tell the origin of trout flesh.

Bay of Plenty Regional Aquaculture Organisation

The Bay of Plenty Regional Aquaculture Organisation was established in 2010 to implement the Bay of Plenty Aquaculture strategy.¹ The organisation said that trout farming is practised in over 60 countries. It uses well developed technology to facilitate the successful production of fish, the preservation of the natural environment, and a good profit. The organisation also believes trout farming is unlikely to increase the poaching of wild trout. It references salmon farming as an example, stating that salmon farming has been permitted in New Zealand for over 40 years and has not led to an increase in poaching. The organisation agrees with the petitioner that trout farming is unlikely to threaten the biosecurity of New Zealand. It also pointed out that the recreational value of wild trout fisheries would not be lost by the introduction of trout farming as anglers would still be able to enjoy fishing for wild trout.

¹ The strategy can be found here: <https://cdn.boprc.govt.nz/media/276352/aquaculture-strategy-lr-final.pdf>

Other supporters

We note that Lake Taupō Forest Trust and Lake Rotoaira Forest Trust also support this petition for the reasons outlined above.

The Fish and Game Council is opposed to trout farming

The New Zealand Fish and Game Council sees trout farming as a threat to New Zealand's sport fishing industry and reputation. It notes that New Zealand is one of the top trout fishing destinations in the world and contributes millions of dollars to the rural economy. Fish and Game believes that the legalisation of trout farming would encourage the poaching of wild trout. This would lead to the depletion of wild fish stocks and the destruction of spawning areas. It argues that it would be expensive and difficult to manage the risk of poaching as it occurs out of sight in remote areas.

Further, Fish and Game says it recognises that the threat of fish diseases is always present, but it believes trout farming may increase this risk.

Other opposition to trout farming

The Federation of Freshwater Anglers opposes the petition for the same reasons as Fish and Game. It also noted that fish farms can adversely affect the natural environment because untreated waste products can be flushed out into surrounding waters.

Comments from the Department of Conservation

Trout, including rainbow and brown trout, are introduced species. They are found in many waterways in New Zealand. Trout are a valued recreational resource, but have adversely affected some native species. The wild trout fishery is managed as a Crown resource by 12 regional Fish and Game Councils and, in Taupō District, by the Department of Conservation (DOC). Persons fishing for trout must hold a sports fishing licence issued by the respective entities. In New Zealand trout can only be obtained by people who hold this licence and catch their own.

The risk of poaching

DOC maintains that the legalisation of commercial trout farming and the sale of trout could adversely affect the New Zealand wild trout fishery. It said that people might be incentivised to poach and sell wild trout if the sale of farmed or imported trout was allowed. Trout lend themselves to easy poaching as they spawn (lay their eggs) in large numbers, often in easily accessible areas. Poaching also damages areas where trout spawn. DOC considers that the wild trout fishery is already under pressure from current fishing levels, and any increase in the number of fish taken could adversely affect its recreational and economic value.

DOC officers have observed people catching 30 to 80 trout in less than an hour by sweeping a spawning area with a net. Currently, this provides a cheap food source but it could be used for financial gain if the sale of trout was permitted in New Zealand. In Australia that catch would be worth between \$600 and \$1,600 at wholesale prices.

We heard that it is hard to quantify the risk of trout poaching based on comparisons to other New Zealand species or trout farming overseas. This is because the management of these fisheries would differ significantly from the management of New Zealand trout fisheries. The

sale of salmon has not led to an increase in salmon poaching but this is likely because wild salmon are found in only a few South Island rivers. Trout are found in large numbers in more locations.

Biosecurity threats

DOC told us that trout farming could threaten New Zealand's biosecurity because it would invariably lead to the importation of new genetic material to introduce desirable traits that are not found in the domestic population. Despite New Zealand's strict biosecurity systems, this material could bring diseases that negatively affect New Zealand's ecosystems.

Biosecurity of aquatic species is managed by the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI). Several fish diseases have been detected in hatchery or aquatic rearing facilities at various times in the past. They mainly pose risks to the aquaculture industry, but can also threaten wild fisheries. Also, it is generally more difficult to manage aquatic pests and diseases compared to those found on land. DOC said that the effects of trout farming on New Zealand's biosecurity and the prevalence of diseases are unknown. More monitoring would definitely be required if trout farming was introduced.

Trout farm locations

The ministry noted that the opportunity to establish trout farms may be limited by the natural environment. In recent years the flooding of many trout spawning sites has caused these sites to become unsuitable. Trout farms would be competing for suitable sites with wild fish populations, which could adversely affect the wild trout fishery. Trout farms would also be competing with salmon farms for the best locations.

Financial costs associated with trout farming

We heard that the fee for a sports fishing licence may need to be increased to meet costs, if the commercial farming and sale of trout was allowed in New Zealand. Enforcement costs would increase as the process became more complex, with officers having to check documentation to find out whether trout for sale had been obtained legally. Currently, all costs associated with maintaining the wild fishery are covered from the sale of fishing licences and a substantial volunteer effort.

New Zealand could benefit from GST and other tax benefits from employment and commercial activity in the aquaculture food industries, if the commercial farming and sale of trout was legalised. However, these benefits might be offset by a decrease in employment, commercial activity, and tax benefits if industries dependent on the wild trout fishery experienced a loss of business due to the commercialisation of trout.

Mitigating the risks of trout farming

If the farming and commercial sale of trout were to be legalised, DOC recommends that it be limited to recirculating systems of production. These systems limit water exchange with the external environment and use filtration to maintain a suitable habitat for the fish. This could reduce the biosecurity risk as it would prevent the mixing of wild and farmed fish.

If legislation was changed to allow the commercial farming and sale of trout, the current import prohibition would also need to be revoked to meet the expectations of international

trading partners. DOC would recommend delaying the lifting of the import prohibition to allow the domestic market to establish itself.

DOC emphasised that New Zealand is not easily comparable to other countries that allow the farming and sale of commercial trout. This is because other countries have different fish stocks, use artificial spawning to boost fish numbers, and fisheries are often difficult to access, which limits poaching opportunities.

Comments from the Ministry for Primary Industries

MPI offered similar comments as DOC. It recognises that the legalisation of trout farming and the sale of commercial trout could bring potential economic benefits to New Zealand. Coastal iwi and regional communities could benefit in particular. However, it also notes that recreational angling bodies strongly oppose the commercialisation of trout as it could pose significant disease and poaching risks. This was highlighted by a strong response in opposition to trout farming research proposals in the 2015 Bay of Plenty Economic Action Plan. Despite this, the investigation of commercial trout farming is still part of this plan.

The ministry noted that there has been limited recent analysis of commercial trout farming in New Zealand. This would be needed to inform any changes to its current non-commercial status, and to address opposing views. However, information is available from other countries, and from the farming of salmon in New Zealand, which could be used to understand the issues and options around trout farming.

MPI recommends that, if the legalisation of trout farming were to progress, a review of the following would need to be undertaken:

- biosecurity and disease risks
- the risks around poaching
- the risks to the wild trout population
- the risks associated with wild trout coming in contact with farmed trout
- the economic potential of trout farming.

Also, given the opposition to such a change, the ministry recommends that extensive consultation with tangata whenua and interested parties be undertaken before any decision is made to change the current status of commercial trout farming in New Zealand.

Our response to the petition

We were disappointed that the evidence provided by MPI put a strong emphasis on the oppositional reasons to commercial trout farming.

We asked why evidence provided by MPI notes strong opposition to commercial trout farming when many submissions we received promoted it. MPI said it drew on previous public dialogue to form this evidence. For example, recreational angling bodies voiced opposition to trout farming in response to it being included in the 2015 Bay of Plenty Economic Action Plan.

We heard that trout fishing hatcheries already exist in New Zealand. We think it is illogical to argue that the risk of disease is a reason to prohibit trout farming, given that the risk of disease is already present in the hatcheries.

We have considered the available evidence outlining the benefits and costs of legalising the commercial farming and sale of trout, and think it could be a viable option for New Zealand.

We thank the petitioner for bringing this issue to our attention. We have considered the petition and recommend that the Government give serious consideration to commercialising trout farming.

Appendix

Committee procedure

The petition was referred to us on 16 May 2018. We met between 24 May 2018 and 6 August 2020 to consider it. We received written submissions and heard oral evidence from the petitioner and the Ministry for Primary Industries. We also received written submissions from the following:

Bay of Connections
Department of Conservation
Ministry for Primary Industries
Iwi Collective Partnership
Lake Rotoaira Forest Trust
Lake Taupō Forest Trust
New Zealand Federation of Freshwater Anglers
New Zealand Fish and Game Council
Ngati Pikiāo
Ngati Ruapani Ki Waikaremoana
Ngati Tuwharetoa Fisheries Charitable Trust
Trout New Zealand
Tumu te Heuheu
Tuwharetoa Maori Trust Board.

Committee members

Barbara Kuriger (Chairperson)
Kiritapu Allan
Hon David Bennett
Andrew Falloon (until 21 July 2020)
Kieran McAnulty
Ian McKelvie (from 22 July 2020)
Mark Patterson
Rino Tirikatene
Hamish Walker (until 22 July 2020)
Lawrence Yule (from 22 July 2020)

Stuart Smith participated in some of our work on this petition.

Evidence received

The documents we received as evidence in relation to this petition are available on the Parliament website, www.parliament.nz.