



A petition to the federal government aims to ban cephalopod farms in Canada. (Credit: Pixabay)

There are no octopus farms in Canada. BC SPCA, experts call on feds to keep it that way

Experts say practice not only morally questionable, but environmentally destructive too

JANE SKRYPNEK / Mar. 24, 2023 5:00 a.m. / CANADA & WORLD / NEWS

More than 11,000 people and growing are calling on the federal government to ban the captive farming of octopuses – a practice that has not yet taken hold in Canada.

Sponsored by Green Party leader Elizabeth May and backed by the BC SPCA, a federal petition is aiming to take preventative action against an area of industry that they say has significant ethical and environmental concerns.

No such farms exist in the country, but aquaculture companies have been experimenting with breeding cephalopods in Latin America, Japan, Italy and Australia. The most advanced operation by far is a project in the Canary Islands, where Spanish company Nueva Pescanova says it is “a world pioneer” in octopus aquaculture.

Concern among academics and animal welfare groups was heightened at the end of February, when Spanish daily newspaper Faro de Vigo reported Canadian seafood giant Cook Inc. is negotiating purchasing a majority stake in Nueva Pescanova.

Faro de Vigo only cited anonymous sources for its knowledge about the deal, and Cook Inc. declined an interview with Black Press Media. The company, which boasts 10,000 employees across nine countries, said it does not comment on “rumoured or speculated” mergers and acquisitions.

Nueva Pescanova did not respond to a request for comment in time for publication.

Regardless of Cook Inc.’s alleged actions, those with knowledge of octopuses and aquaculture say farming of the creatures needs to be banned before it begins.



Animal welfare groups and some academics have serious concerns about the ethical and environmental implications of a growing interest in farming octopuses. (Credit: Pixabay)

The concerns are multi-fold.

Octopuses are unusually intelligent invertebrates, capable of problem-solving and remembering skills taught to them for long periods of time. It's also largely accepted among animal sentience researchers that octopuses do, in fact, feel pain.

"There's definitely a major animal welfare concern. We know that these are very complex and intelligent creatures, so keeping them in enclosures without environmental enrichment is obviously going to be distressful for them," says Melissa Speirs, a farm animal welfare manager at the BC SPCA.

And while the moral consideration may not be enough for some, renowned marine biologist and University of British Columbia professor Daniel Pauly argues that the environmental one ought to be.

Octopuses, like many farmed aquatic species, are carnivorous and depend on large quantities of food to stay alive. In fact, octopuses consume about three times their own weight in fellow sea creatures.

“So you have an efficiency loss of about 75 per cent of perfectly edible fish to produce another fish,” Pauly says. “It’s a frivolous way of producing luxury food.”

In a time when food security and the health of the world’s oceans are of particular concern, Pauly says farming octopuses would actually deplete global seafood supply.

He and New York University environmental studies professor Jennifer Jacquet agree that money is the only real driver behind the push for octopus farms. The creatures grow fast and have relatively short life spans, making them an appealing product to pump out. And the demand for them has increased in recent years.

“This is not about feeding the world, this is about people who want to eat something exotic when they go out with their friends on a Friday night,” Jacquet says.

As the deputy director of NYU’s Center for Environmental and Animal Protection, Jacquet has been pushing for a public conversation about the farms for years.

In a paper she co-authored in 2019 titled The Case Against Octopus Farming, Jacquet and fellow academics explained that little research has been done on octopuses in captivity, but studies into other farmed fish suggest there would be increased stress, injury and disease.

The latter is something B.C. is all too familiar with, in the farming of salmon and the diseases they’ve been linked to spreading to wild populations.

READ ALSO: Fisheries Department to shut 15 salmon farms off B.C.'s coast to protect wild fish



Some researchers believe mass farming octopuses could lead to issues with diseases, similar to what B.C. has seen with salmon production. (Credit: Pixabay)

May, who is also MP of the Saanich-Gulf Islands riding, says the idea of adding another form of potentially destructive aquaculture is “pretty distressing.”

She sponsored [Petition e-4312](#), which calls not only for Canada to ban cephalopod farms in the country, but also to prohibit the import of food produced from them elsewhere.

In Canada, government must respond to any MP-sponsored petition that receives more than 500 signatures. The cephalopod petition is open until May 16, at which point the federal government will have 45 days to respond.

Although Washington State is in the process of implementing similar legislation, Canada could be the first country in the world to do so if it decides to act.

May is hopeful it will. She says there are already enough threats to the ocean as it is.

“Please god let’s not add another stupid human activity to the mix.”

READ ALSO: [Tiny B.C. island community’s answer to climate change?](#)

[Feed everyone](#)

[@janeskrypnek](#)

jane.skrypnek@blackpress.ca

Like us on [Facebook](#) and follow us on [Twitter](#).

[BCSPCA](#) [ELIZABETH MAY](#) [FARMING](#) [FISH](#) [OCEAN PROTECTION](#)