

## Talking Point

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# State's secrecy is just a bit fishy

We have a right to know what's going into our water supply, writes **Meg Webb**

**I**s it any wonder Tasmanians lack faith in their public institutions?

The concerning lack of timely public notification regarding the use of antibiotics at Huon Aquaculture's Meadowbank hatchery in January is, sadly, just another example of why many Tasmanians shake their heads on a daily basis at the state of our state. (Downstream users were not informed, although the company had made a voluntary disclosure to the Environment Protection Authority, as reported in the article titled 'Alarm at fish farm practice: Calls for mandatory drug disclosure', Mercury, February 10.)

Ironically, and worryingly, the veil of secrecy was due to our independent regulators failing to inform the community, despite the company self-reporting its use of the antibiotic oxytetracycline to deal with a disease outbreak.

Maybe this is a new way forward – a salmon company “reading the room” and realising that Tasmanians want transparency about what affects their environment.

Importantly, if the salmon industry wants to build greater social licence, this is the least Tasmanian salmon companies can do.

As I said on ABC Radio's Mornings program, Huon had sick fish and had to deal with them.

Following that interview, Huon Aquaculture's general manager of aquaculture went on radio and explained the company's position – why it used the antibiotics, when and how many times.

Where was the EPA? Where was Public Health?

Despite both entities providing statements to one media outlet following the story breaking, neither statement addressed the initial secrecy surrounding the treatment occurring within greater Hobart's water catchment.

The Meadowbank hatchery is about 20km upstream from TasWater's Bryn Estyn water

treatment plant, which is the primary source of drinking water for greater Hobart.

So it's important.

Following confirmation of antibiotic use without public notification, other stakeholders publicly raised their voices in concern and outrage.

As a community we have a right to know what is going into our waterways and our environment and how it might affect us.

Yes, we understand that in our daily lives, in the food and drink we put into our mouths, there are various additives and antibiotics. But at least in the supermarket, you can read the back of the label.

In the modern world, we are only now beginning to understand how antibiotic use has the potential for antimicrobial resistance.

Public Health was informed by the EPA of Huon's intention to use antibiotics at the Meadowbank hatchery shortly before treatment commenced on January 21.

It only became public two weeks later on February 10 following a media outlet breaking the news.

Why weren't Tasmanians informed either at the time the EPA was informed, or as soon as the Public Health response was provided to the EPA?

This is a failure to read the room – a lesson Huon Aquaculture, in this instance, appears to have understood better.

In 2026, Tasmanians deserve better from our institutions like the EPA and Public Health.

We must move to mandatory reporting of antibiotic use and approvals across both marine and freshwater fisheries, along with real-time disclosure of monitoring processes.

**Meg Webb is the independent member for Nelson**



Meg Webb