

Brussels, 2 May 2023

Subject: Nueva Pescanova's plans for an octopus farm, Canary Islands - an invitation for disaster

Dear Mr President of the Government of the Canary Islands Ángel Víctor Torres Pérez,
Mr Director General for Climate Change and Environment José Domingo Fernández Herrera,

This letter concerns the intentions of the Spanish multinational, Nueva Pescanova, to build the first octopus farm in Puerto Las Palmas, Gran Canaria.

We, the concerned Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), understand that the environmental permit required for the construction of this farm has been requested by Nueva Pescanova, and would like to express our concerns over these highly worrisome plans. The scientific community has alerted for the dangers associated to such initiative, not only for animal welfare but also for the environment and human health^{1,2}. Furthermore, many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and citizens have also expressed their opposition towards the industrialisation of octopus farming³.

According to the plans of Nueva Pescanova, around one million octopuses will be reared and slaughtered each year in this farm - an intention that reveals that at stake would be a megalomaniac industrial-scale plan⁴. The project includes 40-60 fattening tanks, 550-650 settlement tanks, 90-110 tanks for paralarvae and 22-36 tanks for broodstock octopuses⁴.

At a time where industrial animal farming is being exposed and highly criticised due to its negative side effects on humans, animals and the environment⁵, it is certainly not wise to grant a construction permit for an octopus farm. Member-States of the EU must move together towards the end of industrial animal farming, rather than individually - so it is critical that Spain also aligns itself with the Union's ambitions when it comes to the sustainability of animal farming and the environment.

The following points highlight our main concerns over Nueva Pescanova's plans, explaining why these represent a welfare and environmental risk, and providing scientific-based evidence^{4,6} proving the potential harmful consequences.

¹ Jacquet J, Franks B, Godfrey-Smith P, Sánchez-Suárez W. The Case Against Octopus Farming. *Issues Sci Technol.* 2019;37-44.

² <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-64814781>

³ <https://www.ciwf.org/media-centre/press-releases-and-media-statements/2022/10/world-octopus-day-ngos-unite-to-call-for-eu-ban-on-cruel-octopus-factory-farming> ; https://www.tilt.green/octopus_farming ; https://secure.avaaz.org/campaign/en/ban_octopus_farming_loc/

⁴ [Uncovering the horrific reality of octopus farming. Eurogroup for Animals and Compassion in World Farming. 2023.](#)

⁵ Willett W, Rockström J, Loken B, Springmann M, Lang T, Vermeulen S, et al. Food in the Anthropocene: the EAT-Lancet Commission on healthy diets from sustainable food systems. *Lancet.* 2019 Feb 2;393(10170):447-92.

⁶ [Octopus Factory Farming: A Recipe for Disaster](#)

1. Octopuses, solitary in nature, will be kept in overcrowded conditions where they will be at risk from aggression and cannibalism.

Octopuses will be kept in groups, at high stocking densities, within Nueva Pescanova farms. Nueva Pescanova plans to keep octopuses at 10-30 kg/m³, which equates to 10 to 15 octopuses per cubic metre. This can result in very poor welfare and creates the risk of aggression and territorialism that can lead to cannibalism.

2. They are highly inquisitive and intelligent.

The mass production of octopuses is likely to have barren, controlled and sterile environments and, therefore, lack sensory inputs.

3. Octopuses will be fed with commercial feeds containing fishmeal and fish oil as main ingredients, posing high environmental risks.

Commercial feeds for carnivorous aquatic species include fishmeal and fish oil as main ingredients, which are viewed as highly unsustainable. Fishmeal and fish oil are mainly produced from forage fish such as anchovy, sardines, herring, and mackerel. Forage fish play a key role in the marine environment, as they are crucial in transferring energy from primary producers to higher trophic level species including large fish, marine mammals, and seabirds. Therefore, the use of these species to feed aquatic carnivorous species poses high environmental risks.

4. Octopuses will be killed using ice slurry without pre-stunning, an inhumane method that causes pain, fear, and suffering.

Nueva Pescanova plans to kill octopuses by submerging them in tanks containing 500 litres of water with ice at -3/0°C, which will result in a painful, stressful, and slow death. The use of ice slurry to kill other aquatic animals, such as fish, without pre-stunning has been scientifically shown to be inhumane, causing considerable pain, fear, suffering and an extremely prolonged death. Given the welfare issues associated with the use of ice slurry, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) discourages its use for several fish species, and the EU is currently drafting legislation to end the practice in major aquaculture sectors. It is unacceptable that ice slurry has been selected to slaughter octopuses, despite the demonstrated problems with the use of this method, and the current efforts to eliminate its use in fish species on welfare grounds.

5. Plans to expose octopuses to 24-hour periods of constant unnatural light are likely to cause significant stress to the animals, who naturally avoid the light.

Nueva Pescanova plans to use 24-hour periods of light during the reproduction period to speed up the spawning of the females. However, octopuses spend much of their time in dark sheltered areas in the wild. Therefore, their natural behaviour is to avoid the light, and the photoperiods of 24 hours of continued light could be very stressful for these animals.

6. Octopus farming is incompatible with the EU Strategic Aquaculture Guidelines (SAGs).

These guidelines encourage the reduction of aquaculture's reliance on fishmeal and fish oil produced from wild-caught fish and they stress the need for EU aquaculture to diversify, introducing species that do not need fishmeal or fish oil.

We consider that authorising the construction of an octopus farm in Las Palmas is an invitation for an animal welfare and ecological disaster, which Spain should certainly not want to take the lead on. Furthermore, Nueva Pescanova's plans contradict the goals set in the European Green Deal, which guides the Union's plans to shift its food system to a more sustainable and animal-welfare friendly paradigm.

We look forward to hearing your considerations on these worrying plans to industrialize octopus farming.

We remain at your disposal to provide any further clarification.

Thank you for your attention.

With our best regards,

1. Francisco Guerreiro MEP (Portugal)
2. Caroline Roose MEP (France)
3. Luke Ming Flanagan (Ireland)
4. Jutta Paulus (Germany)
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21. Michal Wiezik (Slovakia)
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23. Diana Riba I Giner (Spain)
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30. Pascal Durand (France)
31. Saskia Bricmont (Belgium)

In CC:

European Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries Virginijus SINKEVICIUS

European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety Stella KYRIAKIDES

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