



The Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP
 Secretary of State
 Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs
 Seacole Building
 2 Marsham Street
 London
 SW1P 4DF

25th April 2023

Dear Secretary of State,

We, the undersigned 27 animal protection organisations, are writing to you to call on you to urgently consider the animal welfare implications of proposals to begin octopus farming, and to ensure that products coming from such farms are not permitted into the UK.

As you will be aware, an application has been submitted to establish an octopus farm in the Canary Islands. Although, if approved, the Canary Islands farm would be the world's first industrial octopus farm, there are attempts to establish similar octopus farms in other parts of the world such as Mexico and Japan. Octopus has become an increasingly popular food in recent decades, particularly in Spain. As a result, wild octopus numbers are dwindling. In 2015, the number of octopuses caught around the world reached a high of 400,000 tonnes – 10 times more than in 1950.

In February, in a first move of its kind, Washington State in the US signalled a move toward banning octopus farming. This followed the recent closure of the only active octopus farm in the US, the “Kanaloa Octopus Farm” based in Hawaii. We hope that the UK Government will take a similar approach by prohibiting the import or sale of products from these systems.

Such farms raise serious animal welfare and sustainability concerns due to the cruelty involved and the environmental damage inflicted on our oceans¹.

These farms contribute to the overexploitation of wild fish populations, as highlighted in a recent report.² As carnivorous animals, cephalopods require huge quantities of animal protein to sustain, contributing to overfishing at a time when fish stocks are already under immense pressure.

Experimental trials to farm octopuses suggest that the mortality rate in these systems would be around 20%, meaning that 1 in 5 individuals would not survive the entire production cycle.³

The London School of Economics report on decapod crustaceans and cephalopods, very helpfully commissioned by Defra, found that cephalopods are intelligent, sentient and fascinating creatures.⁴ These animals need to explore and engage with the environment in order to express natural behaviours including den making, tool use, hunting and even play. It is not compatible with this understanding of their complex behaviours that commercial octopus farms would involve the use of cruel slaughter methods and the confinement of octopuses in small barren tanks.

The report also highlights their solitary nature and often aggressive behaviour towards each other when in confined spaces. The report’s authors are “convinced that high-welfare octopus farming is impossible”.

In light of the Animal Sentience Act, which recognises cephalopods as sentient beings, we urge you to take all necessary steps to ensure that the import or sale of products originating from octopus farms is prohibited in the UK.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nick Palmer". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line that extends to the right.

Dr Nick Palmer

Head of Compassion in World Farming UK on behalf of all 27 signatories.

Please direct replies to policy@ciwf.org.

¹ <https://www.ciwf.org.uk/research/species-aquatic-animals/octopus-factory-farming-a-recipe-for-disaster/>

² <https://www.ciwf.org/media/7453342/octopus-factory-farming-report-english.pdf>

³ <https://www.ciwf.org.uk/research/species-aquatic-animals/octopus-factory-farming-a-recipe-for-disaster/>

⁴ <https://www.lse.ac.uk/news/news-assets/pdfs/2021/sentience-in-cephalopod-molluscs-and-decapod-crustaceans-final-report-november-2021.pdf>