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## Memorandum of Support – HB 2557

*Relating to octopus*

Dear Co-Chairs Helm and Owens, Vice Chair McDonald, and Members of the Committee,

The Animal Legal Defense Fund (ALDF), the nation's preeminent legal advocacy organization for animals, and its members in Oregon, appreciate the opportunity to submit this memorandum in strong support of HB 2557, a bill to prohibit a person from raising octopus for the purpose of human consumption or participating in the sale or offer for sale of octopus that was raised for human consumption. This important measure would prevent aquatic farmers in the state from engaging in a practice that is inhumane and carries significant environmental and public health risks. We strongly urge the committee to pass this bill and further the state's reputation as a leader in environmental and animal welfare issues.

### **Octopus farming is inhumane**

Octopuses have inspired people for centuries due to their unique appearance and expectation defying abilities. Scientists are continuously learning more about them and new discoveries are changing the way the public thinks about these impressive creatures. Beyond their color changing ability, octopuses also have significant cognitive ability. They can learn new skills, can navigate complex mazes, are known escape artists, and even use tools.<sup>1</sup> Octopuses are so remarkable that the United Kingdom has legally recognized them as sentient beings, those capable of reasoning and experiencing emotions, deserving of enhanced legal protection.<sup>2</sup> Because of their complex mental ability, octopuses have high enrichment needs that simply cannot be met in farming environments. Keeping octopus in this manner would subject them to intense boredom and mental stress.

Adding to this stress is the number of animals that are forced together in aquatic farm settings. In nature, the octopus is a solitary creature, viewing other octopuses as threats. Thus, cramming a large number of them into small pools together would be cruel and cause significant stress. It could also result in aggression and fighting among the animals, putting their lives in danger before they even reach slaughter. Potential injuries and poor water quality from the high-stocking density within farm systems also puts them at an increased risk for the spread of disease and parasites. Finally, there is currently no accepted humane method of slaughter for octopuses, which would leave them vulnerable to unnecessarily cruel slaughter practices.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Godfrey-Smith, *The Mind of an Octopus*, Scientific American (Jan. 1, 2017), available at <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-mind-of-an-octopus/>.

<sup>2</sup> *Lobsters, octopus and crabs recognised as sentient beings*, UK Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (November 19, 2021), available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/lobsters-octopus-and-crabs-recognised-as-sentient-beings>.

### **Octopus farming has significant environmental risks associated with it**

Octopus farming is not the sustainable practice its proponents claim that it is. As is the case with the intensive farming of other aquatic species, octopus farming could harm the surrounding ecosystems and marine life by spreading pollution and changing water temperatures. There is also a significant risk of farmed octopuses escaping their enclosures, as they are notorious for doing, and impacting local populations. This has been seen in salmon farms with escaped salmon spreading pathogens, creating genetic abnormalities, and increasing competition with local populations.<sup>3</sup> The coast's local populations of octopuses and other marine life should not be put at such a significant risk of disease and genetic mutations.

### **Octopus farming poses a risk to public health**

Octopus farming has the potential to become a significant public health risk. Industrial aquaculture farms are breeding grounds for pathogens, and octopus have been found to be hosts of multiple pathogens and zoonotic diseases that can spread to humans, such as cholera.<sup>4</sup> The use of antibiotics, many of which are used to treat humans as well, to combat these pathogens has the potential for the creation of multi-drug resistant bacteria. The United Nations has labelled antibiotic resistance as a leading threat to human health globally.<sup>5</sup> There is simply no reason to bring these risks to Oregon.

Washington became the first state in the world to ban the farming of octopus in 2024, with California quickly following suit. Hawaii also has a bill under consideration this year to prohibit the practice. The passage of this bill here in Oregon would be a strong step toward protecting the Pacific Ocean and its precious ecosystems from unnecessary harm.

For the above welfare, environmental, and public health reasons, the Animal Legal Defense Fund strongly urges the committee to vote yes on this bill. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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<sup>3</sup> Jennifer S Ford and Ransom A Myers, *A Global Assessment of Salmon Aquaculture Impacts on Wild Salmonids*, PLOS Biology (Feb. 12, 2008), available at <https://journals.plos.org/plosbiology/article?id=10.1371/journal.pbio.0060033>.

<sup>4</sup> John W. Forsythe, *A Synopsis of Cephalopod Pathology in Captivity*, National Resource Center for Cephalopods, available at <https://www.vin.com/apputil/content/defaultadv1.aspx?pld=11104&id=3981710&print=1>.

<sup>5</sup> *Environmental Dimensions of Antimicrobial Resistance, Summary for Policy Makers*, UN Environment Programme (2022), available at [https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/38373/antimicrobial\\_R.pdf](https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/38373/antimicrobial_R.pdf).