

Leaked Documents Expose Cruel Conditions And Slow Death Method At World's First Commercial Octopus Farm

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Nueva Pescanova plans to slaughter up to one million of the aquatic animals every year by freezing them to death in "ice slurry" tanks, with the commercial farm set to open this year.



The world's first commercial octopus farm has sparked a significant outcry after leaked documents from Nueva Pescanova revealed the company plans to rear and slaughter up to one million of the aquatic animals every year.

Breeding octopuses in captivity on a commercial scale has been a persistent challenge for the seafood industry. Despite years of research, successful efforts have remained elusive due to a variety of obstacles, such as creating appropriate tank conditions for these solitary hunters and ensuring a steady supply of live prey for the larvae.

In 2019, Nueva Pescanova claimed that they had discovered a viable method of commercially farming octopuses in captivity and set plans in motion to open the world's first octopus factory farm. The plans drew widespread global criticism from animal welfare groups and marine experts, and a [Species Unite petition](https://speciesunite.com/petition) speaking out against the farm has garnered over 50,000 signatures.

Until now, details of the facility have been limited.

Animal activist groups Eurogroup for Animals (EFA) and Compassion in World Farming (CIWF), say that the leaked documents they obtained indicate that the proposed facility would subject octopuses to cruel conditions and a painful, stressful, and slow death.

The campaigners' concerns over the plans are outlined in a new report called "[Uncovering the horrific reality of octopus farming](#)." As noted in the report, Nueva Pescanova plans to kill up to one million octopuses each year by submerging them in 500-liter "ice slurry" tanks, where they will eventually freeze to death - a method scientifically proven to be inhumane.

"To kill them with ice would be a slow death," Dr. Peter Tse, who studies octopus cognition at Dartmouth, told the *BBC*. "It would be very cruel and should not be allowed."

The report also condemns the overcrowded conditions the aquatic animals will endure. To supply "premium international markets" including the US, South Korea, and Japan, Nueva Pescanova plans to produce 3,000 tonnes of octopus a year. This equates to around one million animals, with some 10-15 octopuses living in each cubic meter of tank, according to CiWF. Due to their mostly solitary nature, the octopuses will be at risk from aggression and cannibalism.

In the wild, octopuses tend to spend most of their time in dark, sheltered areas. These creatures are capable of sensing light in their arms, and researchers have observed that they tend to fold their arms during the daytime and extend them at night, a behavior that corresponds to an instinctive manner to protect themselves from potential predators. Despite this, Nueva Pescanova also plans to use 24-hour periods of light during the reproduction period to speed up the spawning of the females.

Nueva Pescanova estimates in its documentation that there will be "a mortality rate of 10-15%". "Large numbers of octopuses should never be kept together in close proximity. Doing this leads to stress, conflict and high mortality ... A figure of 10-15% mortality should not be acceptable for any kind of farming," Jonathan Birch, associate professor at the London School of Economics told the *BBC*. Birch recently [led a review](#) of more than 300 scientific studies that testified to the intelligence of octopuses and noted their sentience, their ability to suffer, and the difficulty of humanely farming these animals. This research led to octopus, along with other marine animals, being written into UK animal welfare laws that were updated to now recognize their sentience.

"Blindly establishing a new farming system without consideration of the ethical and environmental implications is a step in all the wrong directions and flies in the face of the EU's plans for a sustainable food transformation," said Reineke Hameleers, CEO at EFA.

Opposition to intensive farming of these creatures is growing. In February, Washington State in the US [signaled a move](#) toward banning octopus farming, which would be the first of its kind. This followed the recent closure of the only active octopus farm in the US, the "Kanaloa Octopus Farm" based in Hawaii.

But it is feared that Nueva Pescanova's upcoming commercial octopus farm could spell a wave of similar facilities opening, with similar attempts underway in other parts of the world such as Mexico and Japan, and mark the start of the mass farming of these animals.

"Factory farming is the biggest single cause of animal cruelty on the planet, and it's literally destroying our planet," said Elena Lara, Research Manager at CiWF and author of the report. "We should be ending

factory farming, not finding new species to confine in underwater factory farms. We must end octopus farming now.”

Demand for octopus meat is rising, with around 771.6 million pounds caught from the seas each year. This in turn is causing global stocks to seriously decline. Nueva Pescanoa claims that they are opening this factory farm to compensate for this. Conservationists, however, see no reason why the fishing industry will stop hunting wild octopuses in addition to raising them in captivity.

In addition, there is a great deal of concern about the fish that will be used as a food source for the octopuses raised in confinement. There is already an enormous strain on aquatic animals from overfishing, as trillions of aquatic animals are killed every year for human consumption. Commercial feeds for carnivorous aquatic species include fishmeal and fish oil as main ingredients, which are viewed as highly unsustainable, said CiWF.

Nueva Pescanova has already invested over €65 million in its farm but it has yet to receive all of its needed permits to operate and is awaiting approvals from Spain’s Environmental Impact Assessment.

Growing Opposition

Meanwhile, Species Unite, CiWF, EfA, and many other animal rights organizations are calling for the EU to ban octopus farming and stop this new form of mechanized animal cruelty before it is too late.

“With the current revision of the animal welfare legislation, the European Commission now has the real opportunity to avoid the terrible suffering of millions of animals. We cannot afford to leave aquatic animals behind,” said Hameleers. “We’re calling on the EU to include a ban on octopus farming before it ever sees the light of day, in order to avoid plunging more sentient beings into a living hell.”



