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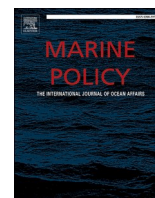
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A balanced approach to the potential of octopus aquaculture

Sustainable Cephalopod Aquaculture and Welfare Group^{*,1}

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Octopus aquaculture has become a subject of debate. Some critics have expressed the opinion that it raises significant ethical concerns regarding animal welfare and poses ecological risks [1]. This opinion has led to the prohibition of octopus aquaculture in the states of California and Washington during 2024, and there is currently a bill before the US Senate proposing to ban it across the United States [2]. An alternative view is here expressed by researchers specializing in cephalopods (octopus, squid, cuttlefish and nautilus) at 66 research institutions in 25 countries. In our opinion, a blanket ban disregards the potential benefits of octopus aquaculture, which is still at an experimental stage and could contribute to sustainable food systems and resource conservation if developed with robust scientific oversight. Concerns about the welfare and sustainability of animals raised as food for humans are important but both are being addressed proactively through scientific innovation, research and regulation [3], so outright prohibition of octopus aquaculture is unwarranted.

Global demand for meat products is predicted to increase to two billion t yr⁻¹ by 2050 [4]. As terrestrial farming of livestock such as beef, pork or poultry struggles to meet this demand sustainably, aquaculture offers a viable alternative for dietary protein production. Aquatic foods, including cephalopods, are highly nutritious and benefit human health [5]. Also, in many tropical countries where cephalopods are distributed, their culture could be a productive alternative which, on a small scale, could contribute to local food security, improve the standard of living and reduce the vulnerability of economically depressed coastal communities [6].

The argument that octopus sentience renders farming them unsuitable [1] overlooks the fact that animals raised for human consumption for thousands of years—such as pigs, cows and chickens—are not less sentient, yet humane farming practices are still being developed, improved, refined and regulated to ensure their welfare [3]. Appropriate welfare standards should, of course, be applied also to octopuses in aquaculture, identifying and meeting their particular physical and cognitive needs [7].

Additionally, concerns regarding the carnivorous diet of octopuses, and its potential environmental impact, should not automatically disqualify octopus aquaculture. Ongoing research suggests that sustainable octopus aquaculture is feasible. For example, some carnivorous fish farms use > 70 % plant-derived ingredients in their fish feed [8]. Proposals to ban octopus aquaculture [1,2] risk halting such progress, denying the contribution of octopus aquaculture to global food, nutrition and economic security without adding pressure to overfished wild octopus populations [9], which for millennia have been exploited by humans as a food source [9,10]. Given the forecasted rise in demand for animal-source protein, it is essential to explore all viable, sustainable and ethical food production systems rather than dismiss any prematurely.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Ian Gleadall: Conceptualization, Writing – original draft. **Roger Villanueva:** Conceptualization, Writing - original draft. All authors: Writing – revision & editing.

^{*} Corresponding authors at: AiCeph LLC, Sendai, Japan and Institut de Ciències del Mar, ICM-CSIC, Barcelona, Spain. *E-mail addresses:* enoctopus@yahoo.co.uk (I.G. Gleadall), roger@icm.csic.es (R. Villanueva).

¹ Sustainable Cephalopod Aquaculture and Welfare Group collaborators are listed as the authors in the Appendix at the end of the article.

Declaration of Competing Interests

The authors declare that they are research scientists writing to express their opinion about the feasibility of octopus aquaculture and have no personal relationships or direct financial interests in any potential commercial octopus aquaculture industry. Ian G. Gleadall is Executive Director of AiCeph LLC and Consultant to Hotland plc, Tokyo (a fast-food franchise company specialising in octopus products).

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Appendix

List of authors: Ian G. Gleadall^{a,*}, Roger Villanueva^{b,*}, Gregory J. Barord^{c,3}, Zoe Doubleday^{d,4}, Felipe Aguado-Giménez^{e,5}, Nobuhiko Akiyama^{f,6}, Eduardo Almansa^{g,7}, Cheryl L. Ames^{h,8}, Alexander Arkhipkin^{i,9}, Otilio Avendaño^{j,10}, Chris Barrett^{k,11}, Giambattista Bello^{l,12}, John R. Bower^{m,13}, Ramiro Braga^{n,14}, Felipe A. Briceño^{o,16}, Paco Bustamante^{r,17}, Claudia Caamal-Monsreal^{i,18}, Miguel Cabanellas-Reboredo^{s,19}, Sergio A. Carrasco^{t,20}, Sheila Castellanos-Martínez^{u,21}, Jesús Cerezo Valverde^{v,22}, Leo Ji-Ho Che^{w,23}, Wen-Sung Chung^{x,24}, Shigeki Dan^{y,25}, Mariana Díaz-Santana-Iturríos^{z,26}, Pedro Domingues^{aa,27}, Erica Donlon Durante^{d,28}, Alejandro Escánez^{ab,29}, Viviana Espinoza^{ac,30}, Ana Farías^{ac,31}, Fernando Ángel Fernández-Álvarez^{b,32}, Pedro Ferreiro-Velasco^{ad,33}, Graziano Fiorito^{ae,cl,34}, Hidetaka Furuya^{af,35}, Pedro Gallardo^{j,36}, Kostas Ganiyas^{ag,37}, Camino Gestal^{ah,38}, Alexey V. Golikov^{ai,39}, Ángel F. González^{aj,40}, Roberto González-Gómez^{ak,41}, Jessica Gordon^{al,42}, Angel Guerra^{aj,43}, Juergen Guerrero-Kommritz^{am,44}, Karina Hall^{an,45}, Manuel Haimovici^{ao,46}, Katsuyuki Hamasaki^{y,47}, Jorge Hernández-Urcera^{aj,48}, Jorge Hernández-Velásquez^{ac,49}, Noritaka Hirohashi^{ap,50}, Kazuki Hirota^{aq,51}, Neil Hutchinson^{ar,52}, Pamela Imperadore^{ae,53}, Yoko Iwata^{as,54}, Maria de Lourdes Jiménez-Badillo^{ay,60}, Yoshiki Kato^{at,55}, Oleg N. Katugin^{au,56}, Ryosuke Kimbara^{av,57}, Zdenek Lajbner^{aw,58}, Germaine Lau^{ax,59}, Nai Markaida^{az,61}, Lorenzo Marquez^{ba,62}, M. Virginia Martín^{g,63}, Maite Mascaro^{j,64}, Natalie Moltschaniwskyj^{an,65}, Óscar Monroig^{bb,66}, Amalia E. Morales^{bc,67}, Ana Moreno^{bd,68}, Piedad S. Morillo-Velarde^{be,69}, Jaruwat Nabhitabhata^{bf,ck,70}, Manuel Nandé^{bg,71}, Juan C. Navarro^{bb,72}, Goh Nishitani^{bh,73}, Harini Nishshanka^{bi,74}, Atsushi Ogura^{bj,75}, Aurelio Ortega^{ak,76}, Nicolás Ortiz^{bk,77}, Jaime Otero^{bl,78}, Rodrigo Oyanedel^{bm,79}, Yumeng Pang^{bn,80}, Cristina Pascual^{j,81}, Catalina Perales-Raya^{g,82}, João Manuel Figueiredo Pereira^{bd,83}, Cristina Pita^{bo,84}, Giovanna Ponte^{ae,cl,85}, Anne Marie Power^{bp,86}, Delta Putra^{bh,87}, Antoni Quetglas^{s,88}, Tiago Repolho^{bq,89}, Jean-Paul Robin^{br,90}, Francisco Rocha^{bs,91}, Alex Romero^{bt,92}, Rui Rosa^{bq,93}, Carlos Rosas^{j,94}, Rigoberto Rosas-Luis^{bu,95}, Katina Roubmedakis^{bv,96}, Álvaro Roura^{aj,97}, Rushan M. Sabirov^{bw,98}, João B.L. Sales^{pl,15}, Pilar Sánchez^{b,99}, Noriyoshi Sato^{f,100}, Warwick H.H. Sauer^{bx,101}, Paul W. Shaw^{by,102}, Shuichi Shigeno^{bz,103}, Roxana De Silva-Dávila^{ca,104}, Chikatoshi Sugimoto^{cb,105}, Yasuo Tsukahara^{cc,106}, Iker Uriarte^{ac,107}, Maria Valls^{s,108}, Silvina Van der Molen^{cd,109}, Inmaculada Varó^{bb,110}, Iván Velázquez-Abunader^{ce,111}, Diego G. Vilarnau^{b,112}, José C. Xavier^{cf,113}, Masa-aki Yoshida^{cg,114}, Xiumei Zhang^{ch,115}, Jian Zheng^{ci,116}, Xiaodong Zheng^{ci,117}, Mehmet Arif Zoral^{aw,118}

Author affiliations: ^a AiCeph LLC, Sendai, Japan; ^b Institut de Ciències del Mar, ICM-CSIC, Barcelona, Spain; ^c Central Campus Regional Academy, Des Moines, IA, USA; ^d University of South Australia, Adelaide, South Australia, Australia; ^e Centro Oceanográfico de Santander, (IEO-CSIC), Santander, Spain; ^f Tokai University School of Marine Science, Department of Fisheries, Shizuoka, Japan; ^g Centro Oceanográfico

de Canarias (IEO-CSIC), Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Spain; ^h Graduate School of Agricultural Science & WPI-AIMEC (Advanced Institute for Marine Ecosystem Change), Tohoku University, Sendai, Japan; ⁱ Fisheries New Zealand, Ministry of Primary Industries, Wellington, New Zealand; ^j Unidad Multidisciplinaria de Docencia e Investigación, Facultad de Ciencias, UNAM. Sisal, Yucatán. Mexico; ^k Collaborative Environmental Advisors, Southampton, England, UK; ^l Retired; Formerly Veterinary Medicine, University Aldo Moro, Bari, Italy; ^m Faculty of Fisheries Sciences, Hokkaido University, Hakodate, Japan; ⁿ Laboratorio de Cefalópodos. Instituto de Biología de Organismo Marinos - Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas (IBIOMAR-CONICET), Puerto Madryn, Chubut, Argentina; ^o Laboratorio de Crustáceos y Ecosistemas Costeros. Centro Austral de Investigaciones Científicas - Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas (CADIC-CONICET), Ushuaia, Tierra del Fuego, Argentina; ^p Universidade Federal Do Pará, Grupo de Investigaçao Biológica Integrada (GIBI), Centro de Estudos Avançados da Biodiversidade (CEABIO), Belém, Brazil; ^q Fundación NIVA Chile Research, Puerto Varas, Chile; ^r Laboratoire LIENSs, CNRS - La Rochelle Université, La Rochelle, France; ^s Centro Oceanográfico de Illes Balears (COB-IEO), CSIC, Palma, Spain; ^t Departamento de Oceanografía, Facultad de Ciencias Naturales y Oceanográficas, Universidad de Concepción, Concepción, Chile; ^u Instituto de Investigaciones Oceanológicas, Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, Ensenada, Baja California, Mexico; ^v Marine Aquaculture Station, Murcia Institute of Agri-Food Research and Development (IMIDA), Murcia, Spain; ^w On study leave, resident in Long Beach, CA, USA (Former affiliation: Gurumeito, Ltd., Ishinomaki, Miyagi, Japan); ^x Queensland Brain Institute, The University of Queensland, St Lucia, Australia; ^y Tokyo University of Marine Science and Technology, Tokyo, Japan; ^z Instituto Mexicano de Investigación en Pesca y Acuicultura Sustentables, Dirección de Investigación Pesquera en el Pacífico, CRIAP La Paz, La Paz, Baja California Sur, Mexico; ^{aa} Centro Oceanográfico de Vigo, IEO-CSIC, Vigo, Spain; ^{ab} Universidade de Vigo, Departamento de Ecología y Biología Animal (BA2), Spain; ^{ac} Hatchery de Invertebrados Marinos, Instituto de Acuicultura y Medioambiente, Sede Puerto Montt, Universidad Austral de Chile, Chile; ^{ad} Sustainable Fisheries Partnership, Honolulu, Hawaii, USA; ^{ae} Department of Biology and Evolution of Marine Organisms (BEOM), Stazione Zoologica Anton Dohrn, Napoli, Italy; ^{af} Graduate School of Science, Osaka University, Osaka, Japan; ^{ag} School of Biology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece; ^{ah} Instituto de Investigaciones Marinas, CSIC, Vigo, Spain; ^{ai} GEOMAR Helmholtz Centre for Ocean Research, Kiel, Germany; ^{aj} ECOBIOMAR. Instituto de Investigaciones Marinas, CSIC, Vigo, Spain; ^{ak} Centro Oceanográfico de Murcia (IEO-CSIC), San Pedro del Pinatar, Spain; ^{al} School of Life Sciences, University of Essex, Colchester, England, UK; ^{am} Independent Researcher, Santa Marta, Colombia; ^{an} New South Wales Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, Australia; ^{ao} Universidade Federal do Rio Grande -FURG, Brazil; ^{ap} Department of Life Sciences, Shimane University, Shimane, Japan; ^{aq} Graduate School of Science, The University of Tokyo, Tokyo, Japan; ^{ar} School of Science and Technology, Tropical Futures Institute, James Cook University, Singapore; ^{as} Atmosphere and Ocean Research Institute, The University of Tokyo, Kashiwa, Chiba, Japan; ^{at} Japan Fisheries Research and Education Agency, Marine Fisheries Research and Development Center, Yokohama, Japan; ^{au} Pacific branch of Russian Federal Institute of Fisheries and Oceanography (TINRO), Vladivostok, Russia; ^{av} Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology, Molecular Biology Unit, Okinawa, Japan; ^{aw} Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology, Physics and Biology Unit, Okinawa, Japan; ^{ax} Temasek Polytechnic, Singapore; ^{ay} Instituto de Ciencias Marinas y Pesquerías, Universidad Veracruzana. Boca del Rio, Veracruz, Mexico; ^{az} El Colegio de la Frontera Sur, CONACYT, Campeche, Mexico; ^{ba} Centro de Investigación, Innovación y Creación (CIIC-UCT), Universidad Católica de Temuco, Temuco, Chile; ^{bb} Instituto de Acuicultura Torre de la Sal (IATS-CSIC), Castellón, Spain; ^{bc} Departamento de Zoología. Universidad de Granada, Granada, Spain; ^{bd} IPMA, Instituto Português do Mar e da Atmosfera, Lisboa, Portugal; ^{be}

Immunobiology for Aquaculture Group, Department of Cell Biology and Histology, Faculty of Biology, University of Murcia, Murcia, Spain;^{bf} Centre for Marine and Coastal Studies (CEMACS), Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia;^{bg} CIIMAR-Interdisciplinary Centre of Marine and Environmental Research, Portugal;^{bh} Tohoku University Graduate School of Agricultural Science, Sendai, Japan;^{bi} Tetrattech ARD, Colombo, Sri Lanka;^{bj} Nagahama Institute of Bioscience and Technology, Nagahama, Shiga, Japan;^{bk} Laboratorio de Cefalópodos, Instituto de Biología de Organismo Marinos - Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas (IBIOMAR-CONICET), Puerto Madryn, Chubut Argentina;^{bl} Centro Oceanográfico de A Coruña (IEO-CSIC), A Coruña, Spain;^{bm} Instituto Milenio en Socio-Ecología Costera (SECOS), Santiago, Chile;^{bn} Nippon Foundation Ocean Nexus, Department of Marine Affairs, The University of Rhode Island, Kingston, USA; NPO Satoumi Research Institute, Okayama, Japan;^{bo} Instituto de Investigaciones Marinas (IIM-CSIC), Vigo, Spain;^{bp} Ryan Institute, School of Natural Sciences/Zoology, University of Galway, Ireland;^{bq} MARE-Laboratório Marítimo da Guia, Faculdade de Ciências da Universidade de Lisboa, Cascais, Portugal;^{br} Université de Caen Normandie, Caen, France;^{bs} University of Vigo, Spain;^{bt} Laboratorio de Inmunología y Estrés de Organismos Acuáticos, Instituto de Patología Animal, Facultad de Ciencias Veterinarias, Universidad Austral de Chile, Valdivia, Chile;^{bu} IxM SECIHTI-Tecnológico Nacional de México/I. T. de Chetumal, Mexico;^{bv} INMARE, Instituto de Investigaciones Marinas, (IIM-CSIC), Vigo, Spain; and Centro de Investigación y de Estudios Avanzados del Instituto Politécnico Nacional. Mérida, Yucatán, Mexico;^{bw} Kazan Federal University, Kazan, Russia;^{bx} Department of Ichthyology and Fisheries Science, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa;^{by} Department of Life Sciences, Aberystwyth University, Wales, UK;^{bz} TechnoPro Inc., TechnoPro R&D Company, Tokyo, Japan;^{ca} Instituto Politécnico Nacional, Centro Interdisciplinario de Ciencias Marinas, La Paz, Baja California Sur, Mexico;^{cb} Department of Biology, Faculty of Law, Keio University, Yokohama, Japan;^{cc} Professor Emeritus, Tohoku University, Sendai, Japan;^{cd} Laboratorio de Cefalópodos. Instituto de Biología de Organismo Marinos - Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas (IBIOMAR-CONICET), Puerto Madryn, Chubut, Argentina;^{ce} Centro de Investigación y de Estudios Avanzados del Instituto Politécnico Nacional. Mérida, Yucatán, Mexico;^{cf} Centre for Functional Ecology, University of Coimbra, Portugal;^{cg} Shimane University, Oki, Shimane, Japan;^{ch} Zhejiang Ocean University, Zhoushan, Zhejiang, China;^{ci} Ocean University of China, Qingdao, China;^{cj} Institute of Animal Physiology and Genetics, Czech Academy of Sciences, Czechia;^{ck} Excellence Center for Biodiversity of Peninsular Thailand, Prince of Songkla University, Hatyai, Songkhla, Thailand;^{cl} Association for Cephalopod Research 'CephRes', Napoli, Italy.

Author ORCIDs: ¹ 0000-0002-5157-5117; ² 0000-0001-8122-3449; ³ 0000-0002-4482-8016; ⁴ 0000-0003-0045-6377; ⁵ 0000-0001-8931-6180; ⁶ 0009-0000-8672-6176; ⁷ 0000-0002-1015-1334; ⁸ 0000-0003-1132-6834; ⁹ 0000-0001-6725-6869; ¹⁰ 0000-0001-7644-8993; ¹¹ 0009-0009-3385-0435; ¹² 0000-0002-0902-0556; ¹³ 0000-0002-2850-7132; ¹⁴ 0009-0002-5793-4501; ¹⁵ 0000-0001-5914-2124; ¹⁶ 0000-0001-9629-8355; ¹⁷ 0000-0003-3877-9390; ¹⁸ 0000-0002-6986-8313; ¹⁹ 0000-0002-0906-1243; ²⁰ 0000-0002-8179-4222; ²¹ 0000-0001-6929-8245; ²² 0000-0003-3989-6740; ²³ 0009-0008-2088-3484; ²⁴ 0000-0003-0943-8933; ²⁵ 0000-0003-4057-6816; ²⁶ 0000-0002-5253-5395; ²⁷ 0000-0002-9513-5009; ²⁸ 0000-0001-6974-1227; ²⁹ 0000-0001-6956-2974; ³⁰ 0000-0002-8947-5381; ³¹ 0000-0002-3456-0677; ³² 0000-0002-8679-7377; ³³ 0000-0001-5577-3279; ³⁴ 0000-0003-2926-9479; ³⁵ 0000-0002-7086-3122; ³⁶ 0000-0002-1014-4564; ³⁷ 0000-0002-4035-9216; ³⁸ 0000-0003-1931-9567; ³⁹ 0000-0002-1596-2857; ⁴⁰ 0000-0001-6041-9952; ⁴¹ 0000-0001-6561-2591; ⁴² 0000-0003-

4015-5907; ⁴³ 0000-0001-6716-3046; ⁴⁴ 0000-0003-3250-5938; ⁴⁵ 0000-0002-0519-4030; ⁴⁶ 0000-0003-1741-8182; ⁴⁷ 0000-0002-2978-8490; ⁴⁸ 0000-0003-1032-2786; ⁴⁹ 0000-0001-8227-167X; ⁵⁰ 0000-0001-9264-9517; ⁵¹ 0009-0009-2388-3444; ⁵² 0000-0002-8782-3493; ⁵³ 0000-0002-9947-0971; ⁵⁴ 0000-0002-2775-2945; ⁵⁵ 0009-0002-9330-5542; ⁵⁶ 0000-0001-6280-9874; ⁵⁷ 0000-0003-3328-0638; ⁵⁸ 0000-0001-7528-5408; ⁵⁹ 0009-0006-1633-8091; ⁶⁰ 0000-0002-0324-433X; ⁶¹ 0000-0001-6655-4979; ⁶² 0009-0006-5618-5210; ⁶³ 0000-0003-4435-2414; ⁶⁴ 0000-0003-3614-4383; ⁶⁵ 0000-0001-9709-9876; ⁶⁶ 0000-0001-8712-0440; ⁶⁷ 0000-0002-9970-0482; ⁶⁸ 0000-0002-5047-236X; ⁶⁹ 0000-0003-3080-5179; ⁷⁰ 0000-0002-6357-9959; ⁷¹ 0000-0002-7733-1903; ⁷² 0000-0001-6976-6686; ⁷³ 0009-0009-9758-6899; ⁷⁴ 0009-0003-1404-7125; ⁷⁵ 0000-0002-5610-9940; ⁷⁶ 0000-0001-6754-3972; ⁷⁷ 0000-0003-0872-1788; ⁷⁸ 0000-0001-8020-0157; ⁷⁹ 0000-0003-2359-4641; ⁸⁰ 0000-0003-3022-0787; ⁸¹ 0000-0002-8789-8102; ⁸² 0000-0001-7782-2561; ⁸³ 0000-0002-6058-6627; ⁸⁴ 0000-0003-1824-3396; ⁸⁵ 0000-0002-1779-958X; ⁸⁶ 0000-0001-7351-2451; ⁸⁷ 0000-0002-3018-2242; ⁸⁸ 0000-0002-1303-8003; ⁸⁹ 0000-0002-1048-8009; ⁹⁰ 0000-0002-7480-2378; ⁹¹ 0000-0001-6821-7394; ⁹² 0000-0002-9778-1039; ⁹³ 0000-0003-2801-5178; ⁹⁴ 0000-0002-1301-7368; ⁹⁵ 0000-0002-7785-7120; ⁹⁶ 0000-0002-5692-0725; ⁹⁷ 0000-0003-3532-6759; ⁹⁸ 0000-0001-5204-3027; ⁹⁹ 0000-0002-3776-7358; ¹⁰⁰ 0000-0001-5023-5375; ¹⁰¹ 0000-0002-9756-1757; ¹⁰² 0000-0003-2637-6332; ¹⁰³ 0000-0002-6303-3630; ¹⁰⁴ 0000-0002-1163-1217; ¹⁰⁵ 0000-0002-2642-9847; ¹⁰⁶ 0009-0006-5217-1102; ¹⁰⁷ 0000-0001-5082-4188; ¹⁰⁸ 0000-0001-9070-8181; ¹⁰⁹ 0000-0003-0858-842x; ¹¹⁰ 0000-0002-3937-3846; ¹¹¹ 0000-0003-3216-2007; ¹¹² 0000-0002-6517-0962; ¹¹³ 0000-0002-9621-6660; ¹¹⁴ 0000-0002-5221-0320; ¹¹⁵ 0000-0002-7601-755X; ¹¹⁶ 0000-0002-0907-2276; ¹¹⁷ 0000-0003-4052-2324; ¹¹⁸ 0000-0002-2174-8953.

Data availability

No new data were used for the research described in this communication.

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