Australians net benefits of sustainable fish farming

Issues of concern need to be recognized, confronted through research and resolved.

Sir — Your News Feature "Fishing for trouble" (*Nature* **431,** 502–504; 2004) focuses on the potential environmental risks associated with tuna farming in coastal waters off North and Central America. In South Australia, on the other hand, tuna farming is being undertaken in what we believe is an ecologically sustainable manner.

Since 1991, the farming of southern bluefin tuna in South Australia has grown into the largest aquaculture industry (by value) in Australia. Production is currently at about 10,000 tonnes per annum, which is considerably greater than that being produced in Mexico or planned for the United States.

When the industry was first established in Australia, many potential environmental risks were identified. Subsequently, as the industry has developed, researchers have been able to confront some of these early speculative statements with real data and experience. An important part of this process has been the development of a system for identifying and quantifying risks, which has been delivered through projects within the Cooperative Research Centre for Sustainable Aquaculture of Finfish (Aquafin CRC), set up in 2002.

The Aquafin CRC aims to develop knowledge and technologies to underpin the sustainable growth of the finfish aquaculture industry in Australia and has funding of A$72 million (US$53 million) over seven years. This investment comes from the tuna and salmon industries, the Fisheries R&D Corporation, universities, and state and federal research agencies.

In contrast to the fears expressed in your News Feature about spreading disease, we have assessed the health of captive tuna and in all cases the risks ranged from negligible to low under current practices (see www.sardi.sa.gov.au/sbt). Other studies have investigated the impact of tuna farms on the composition of sediments and benthic infaunal communities below the sea-cages. These assessments provide just one measure of the environmental performance of the industry, so research programmes within the Aquafin CRC are now aimed at identifying the nature and quantities of farm wastes and understanding regional effects, such as the impact of farming operations on silver gulls and other key species, including sharks and pinnipeds.

Although we acknowledge that your News Feature provides information that will inform the debate about potential risks of tuna farming in North America, we would argue that tuna farming (and indeed any finfish aquaculture) can be practised in a sustainable manner. The real strength in the model adopted by the Aquafin CRC and its partners is that these issues, rather than fuelling public concern and criticism about sustainability, are openly and robustly confronted through research and resolved through the development of appropriate mitigation strategies.

Anthony Cheshire*, John Volkman†
**South Australian Research and Development Institute, PO Box 120, Henley Beach, South Australia 5022, Australia*
†CSIRO Marine Research, GPO Box 1538, Hobart, Tasmania 7001, Australia

Politics: scientists are as qualified as anyone else

Sir — M. J. Hsu and G. Agoramoorthy argue, in Correspondence, that scientists and teachers should ignore politics (*Nature* **431,** 627; 2004), citing Taiwanese Nobel laureate Lee Yuan-tseh as an example of a scientist's unsatisfactory involvement in politics.

Lee is a highly respected scientist worldwide. This is especially true in his home country, where he has devoted himself to the welfare of the people. In his constant endeavours for Taiwanese sciences, there is not the slightest evidence that Lee has ever been biased by his political preference. It seems to us that citing a signature campaign against him is in itself a political action.

It is pervasive thinking in Taiwan that scientists should not get involved in politics under any circumstances. The main reason, pointed out by advocates of this ideology, is that expertise in science does not guarantee that scientists are masters in politics.

But who does qualify as a master of politics, in reality? Studying politics as an academic discipline is very different from practising it. Meanwhile, this position deprives scientists of their rights to participate in debating public policies.

Scientists can also make a positive contribution when engaged in the political system. They could contribute to a more environmentally friendly energy policy, for example, or security regulations that do not scare away international scholars.

In this regard, Nobel laureates who endorse the politicians they respect should be encouraged, not condemned.

Chun-Liang Pan*, Ming-Chang Chiang†
**Helen Wills Neuroscience Institute, University of California, Berkeley, Berkeley, California 94720, USA*
†Biomedical Engineering Interdepartmental Program, University of California, Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California 90095, USA

If we ignore politics, will politics ignore science?

Sir — The recent News stories and Correspondence on the relationship between politicians and academics (*Nature* **430,** 595; **431,** 1; **431,** 627; and **431,** 1036; 2004) missed a central issue: will politics ignore the scientists?

Nobel laureates in the United States and Taiwan have recently felt compelled to become involved in presidential politics. The explanation most frequently offered for this phenomenon is simply "It's their right as citizens", but the reasons often go deeper than that. Modern scientific and academic research has become so costly that little of the most cutting-edge research can be accomplished without government approval or support, providing a strong motivation for politicking. To be ignored would be a disaster.

Furthermore, in less democratic societies (such as Taiwan was in the recent past) control over intellectual freedom is well documented, providing a strong reason for resistance.

Only 13 years ago, I was told by one of my students that a teacher-officer had asked him whether I had "talked about politics" in my lectures. Teacher-officers were military officers, stationed at Taiwan's universities in those days to work closely with the then-ruling Nationalist Party on a variety of duties, which included keping an eye on political activists on campus.

The recent democratization process in Taiwan has led to a major change in teacher-officers' duties. But the old political atmosphere remains much in evidence. It is no wonder that your correspondent M. J. Hsu, who is currently at Taiwan's National Sun Yat-sen University (*Nature* **431,** 627; 2004), should wish that we could all just ignore politics.

Ying-Hen Hsieh
Department of Applied Mathematics, National Chung Hsing University, Taichung, Taiwan