

# Banding Together to Ban Octopus Farming

119

by Tessa @ ALI Nov 30 2022



Take the 2024 EA Forum Survey to help inform our strategy and priorities

Take the survey

Corporate animal welfare campaigns

Farmed animal welfare

Fish welfare

Frontpage

## Who?

[The Aquatic Life Institute \(ALI\)](#) is an international NGO working to improve the lives of aquatic animals exploited in the food system. Operating from effective altruism principles, ALI seeks to develop, support, and accelerate activities that have positive animal welfare impacts during rearing on farms and during capture in wild fisheries. ALI founded the first global alliance for aquatic animal welfare, the Aquatic Animal Alliance (AAA), now comprised of over 110 member organizations. As new issues arise in this space, we too must steer our efforts in an attempt to curb any additional aquatic animal suffering before it begins.

## What?

The consumer appetite for octopus and squid continues to grow, but wild populations are unstable. The seafood industry is looking to fill the supply gap through new factory farming projects despite numerous environmental, social, public health and animal welfare concerns.

ALI is implementing a global campaign that aims to increase public and legislative pressure on countries/regions where octopus farms are being considered to achieve a regulatory ban, and reduce future chances of these farms being created elsewhere. Additionally, we will work with corporations on procurement policies banning the purchase of farmed octopus.

## Why?

The development of octopus farming casts a spotlight on the collection of concerns connected to these intensive practices. Rather than incentivizing the research and development of aquaculture that could be “efficient and cheap enough” to be commercialized, we should direct investment efforts towards innovative, [alternative forms of seafood](#). From sustainable, environmental, and ethical perspectives, octopus farming should not exist.

. . .

## Campaign Summary

We envision a future in which aquatic animal suffering is dramatically reduced in factory farms. Aquatic animal welfare is a highly neglected and tractable issue. Approximately 500 billion aquatic animals are farmed annually in high-suffering conditions and, to date, there is negligible advocacy aimed at improving welfare conditions for these remarkable beings. We support research to compare potential welfare interventions, and then advocate for the implementation of the most promising initiatives, with the aim of positively impacting aquatic lives for years to come.

ALI unites nonprofits, academic institutions, industry stakeholders, and the public with the common goal of reducing aquatic animal suffering. Our internal research team identifies priorities in areas of uncertainty with the goal of creating a framework to compare the relative impact of different interventions. We then advocate for high aquatic animal welfare amongst key decision-makers that influence how aquatic animals are utilized (e.g. by industry), and how their welfare is defined and governed (e.g. by standards, certifications, policies and guidelines).

ALI spearheads the Aquatic Animal Alliance (AAA), a historic global coalition that believes aquatic animals should lead lives free of industrial suffering. Founded in 2020, the AAA is modeled after Open Wing Alliance, Climate Justice Alliance, and other powerful coalition groups that have demonstrated we are strongest when we work together. Through this coalition, we work with over 110 animal protection organizations across six continents to collectively address the issues facing trillions of aquatic animals.

A ban on cephalopod farming would call on all pillars of ALI’s operation (coalition building, research, and policy change) that could lead to monumental success and trigger institutional/market change.

An overarching goal of this project is to launch a global initiative to increase public and legislative pressure on countries/regions where cephalopod farms are being considered (i.e. Spain, , Mexico, the EU), in order to achieve a ban and reduce future chances of these farms being created elsewhere. To accomplish this task, we will use a multifaceted approach to target smaller objectives.

1. Conduct and map a research landscape that identifies any gaps and existing resources and/or studies. This analysis will include a thorough scientific evaluation of what is known or currently being studied about octopus welfare in captivity and their natural behaviors. We will track any current policies in place within the EU (specifically Spain) that could apply to aquatic animal protection. Understanding economic imports/exports, capturing regions, species' traits, etc. will also serve as a useful tool during this phase.
2. Create a campaign landscape analysis and identify key stakeholders that should be the targets of the campaign communications using the knowledge obtained from step 1.
3. Coordinate with participating members of the AAA to build a strategy, estimate a timeline, and agree on all goals. This phase will also involve the development and creation of several communication pieces (infographics, blog posts, etc.) from multiple organizations, taking an international approach to target different regions in various languages.
4. We will then launch the coalition campaign using materials from step 3 in specific regions focused on a few key targets previously identified in step 2.
5. Strategies used in this campaign will involve research, communications, and policy. We will evaluate our success through documents/articles produced, meaningful engagement with a variety of stakeholders, and the amount of media attention received (thus raising public and industry awareness). Additional success will be measured through meeting opportunities with key legislative decision makers, government support, and regulatory halt to any further operation or mobilization of octopus farms.
6. Build and strengthen relationships with global experts and advisors through the creation of the Aquatic Animal Policy (AAP) focus group to capitalize on global policy opportunities, and form unified welfare asks. We will coordinate the focus group and create collaborative, useful resources (i.e. legislative ban proposals, open letters, etc.) to accompany our efforts.

# Activities to Date

The latest summary of our activities (from June 8, 2022) related to the octopus farming ban campaign are listed below.

- On May 9th we sent a [letter to the Canary islands environmental agency](#) highlighting the potential environmental and biosecurity risks of approving the permit for an octopus farm proposed by Nueva Pescanova. It was signed by over 140 organizations from around the world, including members of the Aquatic Animal Alliance with many additional groups and scientists providing their support as well.
- We had wide global media coverage of the letter: [Seafood source \(Industry news\)](#), [The Fish Site \(Industry news\)](#), [Agencia EFE \(Spain\)](#), [Eco Avant \(Spain\)](#), [Publico \(Spain\)](#), [Scoop \(New Zealand\)](#), [GreenMe \(Italy\)](#), [Expok news \(Mexico\)](#), [Deeper blue \(Ocean news\)](#), [Onet \(Poland\)](#), [Magazyn Istota \(Poland\)](#)
- We urged the public to send tweets and emails to the government officials in the Canary Islands to increase the pressure. Over 700 tweets were sent with a reach of over 600,000 people.
- Two protests are planned in the Spanish embassies by partner organizations, in [Poland](#) and [Japan](#), to urge the government to block an octopus farming project.
- 7 AAA groups sent a letter to local embassies asking them to condemn this project.
- We have coordinated and hosted [2 online events](#) featuring renowned experts on research behind advocacy efforts against octopus farming, and why we must establish legal protection.
- We published an [open letter](#) urging for a ban on cephalopod farming, signed by 97 organizations.
- We also published [an article](#) in One Green Planet, highlighting the importance of prohibiting farm operation.
- And on November 16, 2022 we officially launched the website landing page for the [Octopus Farming Ban](#) campaign.

We were able to carry out these actions with our limited resources, and are confident that with additional funding we can amplify this campaign significantly.

. . .

## What We Know

Cephalopods have existed for millions of years, and are recognized as some of the most intelligent animals in the sea. In 2020, *My Octopus Teacher*, a Netflix original documentary film, captured the heartfelt relationship between human and octopus, placing a spotlight on these miraculous creatures. However, these same creatures are all too often treated as a commodity, which encourages the dangerous possibility of cruel, industrialized cephalopod farming.

In March of 2022, we coordinated 2 online events (mentioned above) featuring renowned experts: Caroline Roose (European Parliament MEP), Dr. Elena Lara (CIWF UK), Dr. Heather Browning (London School of Economics), and Amandine Sanvisens (previously Head of the Aquatic Life Institute Europe), to better understand the research behind pushing for implementing advocacy efforts against octopus farming, and why we must establish legal protection now.

Cephalopod sentience has already been extensively proven. In November 2021, the United Kingdom extended the scope of the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill to recognise octopus and cephalopod molluscs as sentient beings following the findings of a government-commissioned independent review by the [London School of Economics and Political Science \(LSE\)](#). The five-year project drew on more than 300 existing scientific studies to reach a sentient conclusion, and the authors recommended that the government expand its definition of animal welfare to include these animals. On April 7, 2022, the UK Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill passed its final stages in UK Parliament to become law.

Furthermore, [scientists have highlighted the many issues of octopus farming](#), all of which are related to the fact that these animals, like many others, are not suited in any way, shape, or form, for large-scale farming. ALI turns to our [5 pillars of welfare](#) in engagements with key decision-makers. These areas of consideration include: environmental enrichment, feed composition, stocking density and space requirements, water quality, and stunning and slaughter. However, each pillar of octopus welfare is violated when factory farming systems are introduced.

1. Environmental Enrichment:

- a. They are intelligent and inquisitive. Such a high level of enrichment would not be possible, resulting in extreme boredom and chronic mental/physical stress.

2. Feed Composition:

- a. They rely on unsustainable carnivorous diets. An increased use of fishmeal/fish oil derived from capture fisheries would place even more pressure on an already unsustainable practice.

### 3. Stocking Density & Space Requirements:

- a. These animals are solitary by nature. High stocking densities, which is a standard industry practice to amplify production in farms could result in cannibalism.

### 4. Water Quality:

- a. They are very fragile due to the lack of internal or external skeletons, and could be highly susceptible to any sudden changes in their environment.

### 5. Stunning & Slaughter:

- a. Presently, no humane method of slaughter exists. Slaughter methods have been studied, however, none have been scientifically approved as humane.

. . .

## What We'd Like to Know

- Can cephalopods - octopus, cuttlefish, squid - be farmed sustainably?

Sustainable development, by definition, is to satisfy the demands of current generations without threatening the needs of future generations, while taking economic growth, environmental care, and social well-being into account. Under this principle, “sustainable” octopus farming cannot exist.

Commercial aquaculture is unsustainable by nature. Aquaculture has been touted as a solution to overfishing and food security. However, farming carnivorous species, such as octopus and squid, requires an increase in the number of marine species sourced from already strained fisheries using inhumane fishing practices, contributing to a further decrease in declining populations. [One study](#) found that the optimal feeding frequency for oval squid is four to five times per day. Such practices exacerbate food insecurity issues in coastal communities that could otherwise use those lower-level protein sources (e.g. anchovies), that are rich in nutrients and energy, which are instead fed to farmed species.

Commercial aquaculture farms also carry a number of biosecurity and biophysical threats to surrounding environments. A large area of concern is the potential development and rapid spread of unknown pathogens and disease, which could create a substantial public health crisis. COVID-19 has taken place against a backdrop of numerous animal pandemics, each with significant human causal factors. The underwater health and resilience of animals in aquatic farm systems is intertwined with the economic health, public resilience, and security of human society. The exotic

diseases and pathogens associated with unprecedented octopus farming could create an existential threat with little solutions that are readily available. These threats could have detrimental effects on local aquatic animals either indirectly through unknown contaminants and pollutants transferred through discharge, or directly through farmed and wild aquatic animal interactions made possible by instances of escape. If any escapes were to occur due to human error or natural disasters that harm the integrity of enclosures, then diseases, pathogens, chemicals, etc. could be passed from farmed to wild populations leading to negative interactions with local animals and ecosystems and a decrease in the genetic integrity of native aquatic animals.

*We are confident in stating that this is an unsustainable practice, however, any counter arguments are welcomed in order to have a better understanding of the different viewpoints surrounding this topic.*

- What are other perspectives, particularly from an Effective Altruism standpoint (e.g. longtermism), have we not yet considered related to institutional arguments that could convince regulatory agencies that octopus farm operations should be banned?
- Are there any research gaps that should be addressed or investigated?

. . .

We welcome any suggestions or feedback on the information presented here and hope that this insightful forum can provide support in strengthening this initiative.



Mentioned in

- 208 **We Did It! - Victory for Octopus in Washington State**
- 88 **Hiding in Plain Sight: Mexico's Octopus Farm/Research Facade**
- 51 **Why Certify? Aquatic Life Institute's Impact Implementation Via Seafood Certification**
- 36 **EA & LW Forums Weekly Summary (28th Nov - 4th Dec 22')**
- 31 **Animal Advocacy Digest #2 (Nov 18th - Dec 2nd)**

**MORE POSTS LIKE THIS**

147 ▲ KFC Supplier Sued for Cruelty

alene



69 ▲ Over 350,000 laying hens committed to cage-fr...

Daniel Abiliba +3 more



154 ▲ How can we get the world to talk about factory farming?..

LewisBollard



## Comments 12

Sorted by [New & upvoted](#)

▼ Hamish McDoodles 2y

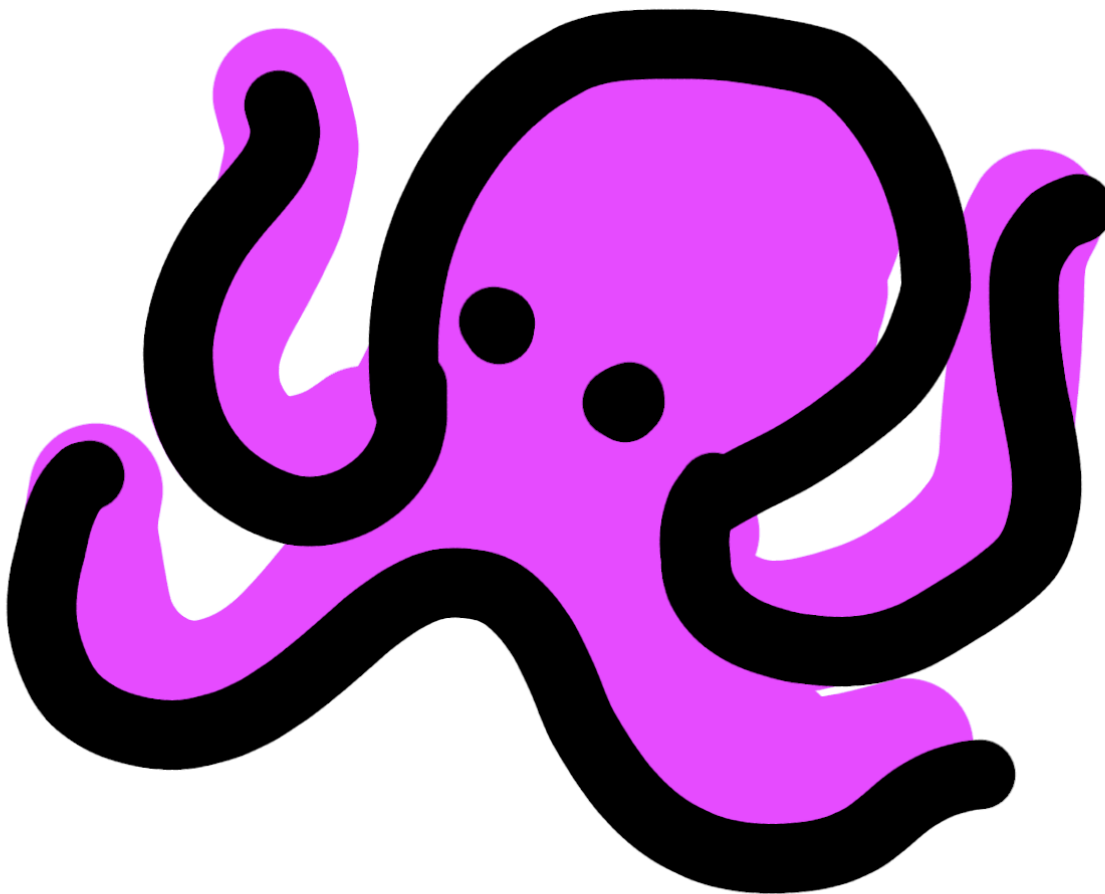
< 11 >

✓ 0

✗ 0



### Summary



- Demand for octopus and squid is growing
- Wild populations of octopus and squid are unstable



- So octopus and squid are likely to be factory farmed in the future
- Octopuses are really smart. It would be an animal welfare disaster for them to be factory farmed.
  - There would also be "environmental, social, public health" concerns
- [The Aquatic Life Institute \(ALI\)](#) is a non-profit trying to prevent this future
- ALI is campaigning to ban octopus farming in countries/regions where this is being considered (i.e Spain, , Mexico, the EU)
- ALI "will work with corporations on procurement policies banning the purchase of farmed octopus"
- ALI "supports research to compare potential welfare interventions"
- So far, ALI has sent some letters to government officials, organised a tweet campign, planned a couple of protests, and run some online events.
- They started a coalition with of 110 animal protection organizations (so like SPCA and stuff), called the Aquatic Animal Alliance (AAA)
- ALI has five welfare concerns for farmed octopuses:
  1. Environmental Enrichment (octopuses could get bored)
  2. Feed Composition (only feeding octopuses fishmeal/fish is unsustainable)
  3. Stocking Density & Space Requirements (octopus are solitary by nature, and high density stocking "could result in cannibalism")
  4. Water Quality
  5. Stunning & Slaughter ("slaughter methods have been studied, however, none have been scientifically approved as humane")

"Approximately 500 billion aquatic animals are farmed annually in high-suffering conditions and, to date, there is negligible advocacy aimed at improving welfare conditions for these remarkable beings."

[Suggestions for how to improve this summary are welcome]

▼ Tessa @ ALI  2y < 2 > ✓ 0 ✗ 0 



Thanks so much for your comment, Hamish. This is a great summary (and a lovely introduction doodle)!

▼ Fai 2y < 9 > ✓ 2 ✗ 1 



To me, the scariest implication of octopus farming is that it updates me downward, maybe significantly, the probability that factory farming will be eliminated/replaced entirely. If humans are so eager to develop a type of factory farming that is so difficult and inefficient, I am afraid I just can't see how we can guarantee that factory farming won't continue into the far future. (yes, I am talking about the type of "far" that the average longtermists speak of)

▼ Tessa @ ALI  2y < 7 > ✓ 1 ✗ 0 



Thank you for your comment, Fai. Yes, it is an unfortunate reality that we are currently faced with regarding the prominence, interest, and advancement of factory farms. Altering this reality will require significant changes in many areas (policy, science, economics). It will also require individuals in each area to "band" together and work towards a better future. I do think it is important to keep that longtermist perspective in mind that you mentioned during these pursuits to try and spark institutional transformations wherever possible.

▼ Hadrian 2y < 4 > ✓ 0 ✕ 0 😊



Thanks for your efforts here. How likely do you think it is that the farm will succeed in creating a commercially viable product, apart from public pressure? Sounds like there are significant biological and ecological barriers.

Also, unrelatedly, seems to me like octopus and squid would be relatively easier to create vegan alternatives to. People mostly like them for the texture, there isn't really a flavor. But I know nothing about the science of alt protein.

▼ Tessa @ ALI 2y < 4 > ✓ 0 ✕ 0 😊



Hi there, Hadrian. Thanks for your support and comment. Unfortunately, it appears as though the environmental permitting regarding this specific farm is being allowed to proceed. And if everything else is successful (building, funding, etc.) we expect operations to fully commence. However, our efforts will be directed towards a variety of stakeholders in order to try and approach this problem from several different angles.

Our friends at the [Good Food Institute](#) are spearheading the alternative protein space with their Sustainable Seafood Initiative to address critical challenges facing the plant-based and cultivated seafood sector if you'd like to take a look at their [cell line repository proposal](#). This area of work is fascinating to me and certainly something we should keep in mind when advocating for alternatives.

▼ William McAuliffe 2y < 1 > ✓ 0 ✕ 0 😊



Thanks for your work on this, Tessa! I have some similar follow-up questions:

"Thanks for your support and comment. Unfortunately, it appears as though the environmental permitting regarding this specific farm is being allowed to proceed."

To clarify, do you mean that Nueva Pescanova has in fact received its environmental permit?

"How likely do you think it is that the farm will succeed in creating a commercially viable product, apart from public pressure? Sounds like there are significant biological and ecological barriers."

I am also interested in ALI's take on this. [Nueva Pescanova claims](#) it will be able to raise 3k tonnes of farmed octopus starting in 2023. Has ALI been able to verify that this scale is actually feasible right now?

Finally, is an outright, blanket ban on octopus legally possible in Spain or the EU (or even narrowly within the Canary Islands)? Or is a "ban" shorthand for "convince legislators that, in practice,

octopus farming won't meet existing minimal environmental and animal welfare standards"? And what existing farmed animal welfare standards could be invoked, given that octopuses are invertebrates, not vertebrates?

▼ Guy Raveh 2y < 3 > ✓ 0 ✗ 0 😊



I tried to donate but ran into problems because the online form only recognised US phone numbers and required my "state" from a list of... Only US states. Do you only accept donations from the US?

▼ Tessa @ ALI 2y < 1 > ✓ 0 ✗ 0 😊



Hi Guy! Apologies for the late reply, but I have just sent you a direct message about this :) thanks for your interest and support. Cheers!

▼ EcologyInterventions 2y < 2 > ✓ 0 ✗ 0 😊



Octopi are some of the most intelligent creatures, with a fascinatingly alien path to getting there and unrecognizable brain structure. I encourage anyone who doesn't know about octopi intelligence to look into it - they aren't social, don't teach each other skills, don't live long, and don't have centralized processing but they rank among the highest intelligence we are aware of.

Something I felt was missing from the post was a mention of how intelligent the octopi and cephalopods are which are likely to be farmed. I thought only a few species of octopi were intelligent, and assume many are average or low levels of cognition for the animal world. I might prefer it to chickens and cows depending on the species...

Your other points about why it would be a terrible subject for farming are compelling, and I appreciate you spelling them out so concisely. Even if they are species average in perceptiveness they might be far worse to farm than other species.

In any case, I'm really glad you brought my attention to this and that you care about this subject!!

▼ Tessa @ ALI 2y < 4 > ✓ 1 ✗ 0 😊



Thanks so much for your support! Yes, they are miraculous creatures and fiercely intelligent. I appreciate your feedback and will certainly keep that in mind for future communications regarding this initiative.

My colleague suggested the book "[The Soul of an Octopus](#)" as a great resource for this subject matter for those who are interested. This is on my reading list for the holiday break coming up, but any additional recommendations are much appreciated!

▼ minthin 2y < 1 > ✓ 0 ✗ 0 😊



I love this campaign--it is so tragic to see octopi eaten :'(

I know I've asked this, but I'm struggling to get a sense of scale of the problem. How many octopi are killed for food...and do we have a sense of how that number could grow? How many octopi is the Canary Islands facility projected to produce? Especially when compared to the gajillions of marine animals killed for food. From the INT framework, I see a potential gap in the "Importance" variable. This campaign is certainly Neglected and Tractable, but so is stealing candy from children : P

One factor in favor of this campaign is the idea that bad practices are a lot easier to prevent than to stop. If we can halt this practice now, it is a lot easier than fighting an entrenched and politically connected industry.

## More from Tessa @ ALI

- ▲ **We Did It! - Victory for Octopus in Washington State** 208 Tessa @ ALI · 5mo ago · 3m read 3 ⋮
- ▲ **Hiding in Plain Sight: Mexico's Octopus Farm/Research Facade** 88 Tessa @ ALI · 1y ago · 4m read 1 ⋮
- ▲ **Why Certify? Aquatic Life Institute's Impact Implementation Via Seafoo...** 51 Tessa @ ALI · 9mo ago · 6m read 2 ⋮

[View more](#)

## Curated and popular this week

**New video from Ali Abdaal (5.74m YT subscribers): Why I'm giving 10% of my income to charity (forever)**

Giving What We Can · 6d ago · 1m read · 2

This new video from Ali Abdaal (which we did not sponsor in any way) covers his decision to take the 10% Pledge back in 2019, and why he decide that his business should take the Company Pledge to give 10% of profits in 2024. Ali covers some of the core arguments for effective giving, as well as his...


**Presenting five new effective giving initiatives**

2 authors · 2d ago · 10m read · 12

Introduction In May 2024, Ambitious Impact (AIM) ran a program to incubate new effective giving initiatives (EGIs) in partnership with Giving What We Can. In short, EGIs focus on raising awareness and funneling...




## Announcing the \$200k EA Community Choice

Austin · 2d ago · 5m read ·  18

Manifold is hosting a \$200k funding round for EA community projects, where the grant decisions are made by you. You can direct \$100-\$800 of funding towards the projects that have helped with your personal journe...

ors) x (\$ each)	\$ donated	\$ matche
0	\$100	\$200
)	\$100	\$100
5	\$100	\$80
0	\$100	\$20

## Relevant opportunities

 **Want to work on US emerging tech policy? Consider the Horizon Fellow...**

31 ES · 16d ago · 1m read

 0



 **Ten minutes to speak up for ~4.5 million caged chickens**

136 Ben Stevenson · 2mo ago · 7m read

 6



 **"Pivotal questions": an Unjournal trial initiative**

27 david\_reinstein · 25d ago · 8m read

 0



[View more](#)