

## **PRESS RELEASE**

**WORLD TOURISM DAY:** People of Poros fear economic disaster if Greece's Government allows a takeover of ¼ of their idyllic island for Industrial Fish Farms. 80% of islanders rely on tourist income, and a new poll shows 87% of residents overwhelmingly oppose the plan. Furthermore, a new analysis reveals major flaws in the Environmental Impact Assessment commissioned by the company pushing for the 28-fold expansion of an existing fish farm

***“Our hearts are deeply saddened with the multiple tragedies in Greece this summer. We also recognize that there is another environmental tragedy looming, but it is one we can avoid. The reality of open net-pen fish farming is that its cost on the environment outweighs any benefit for communities, especially those dependent on nature for tourism, such as Poros.”***

*Eva Douzinas, President, Rauch Foundation*

21st SEPTEMBER 2023 [**LONDON**] A week before World Tourism Day (27th Sept), the small island of Poros, an hour by ferry from Athens, yearns to celebrate its decades-long contribution to Greece's tourism industry, especially given record-breaking numbers visiting the idyllic island this year. As a small island, Poros relies almost entirely on tourists who seek out its quaint atmosphere, pristine bays, pine forests and archaeological interests. Yet the sword of Damocles hangs over it: A plan to expand by 28 times four small industrial fish farms. The plan would take over more than a quarter of Poros's coastline and landmass, threatening lives and livelihoods, as confirmed by a new economic report commissioned by the Rauch Foundation.



[PICTURED: Hundreds of Poros residents gather to view 'Saving Poros' documentary, World Oceans Day, June 2023]

### **ECONOMIC REPORT QUESTIONS 'INDUSTRIAL EXPANSION' VERSUS 'YEAR ROUND TOURISM'**

The new [report](#) by HR&A Advisors shows tourism generates three times more maximum economic impact than aquaculture, and an estimated five times more jobs. With 80% of Poros's 3,200 residents working in tourism, the sector provides 780 jobs and 200+ businesses across the island, yielding €75 million a year. So in the face of the planned aquaculture takeover, the question is: Why swap a helpful boom in tourism for Greece during tough economic times for an industry providing just a handful of jobs? (Aquaculture is one of the most highly tech-automated sectors in the protein industry: fish farms employ an average 3.9 people per farm.)

The report also shows that in similar locations where human-caused natural disasters such as oil spills and algae blooms have occurred, **tourism has decreased by up to 70%**. In the words of Shuprotim Bhaumik, Partner at HR&A, ***“When an island has a thriving tourism market, with 2,000 people entering Poros per day by boat in high season, expanding to year-round tourism is a much more sustainable form of growth. In economic terms, tourism generates three times more economic impact, five times more labour income, and five times the number of full-time equivalent jobs than aquaculture. If fish farms continue to increase efficiency, and therefore require fewer workers – as is happening throughout the industry – we can anticipate that jobs and income will be lower in the future.”***

Fay Orfanidou, Executive Director of Katheti, a non-profit culture & education centre on Poros, comments, ***“Poros is an island with exceptional natural beauty, and a quaint, authentic atmosphere. Over 300,000 people came by boat in 2022 to experience this little piece of heaven. Now, we want to expand our tourism economy, so we have created a local coalition, Ec(h)o to promote eco-tourism***

***on a year-round basis. We are committed to promoting the best environmental practices for hospitality groups. But if the fish farming industry takes over 25% of our island's coastline, these goals would be impossible. The idyllic atmosphere we have so carefully guarded and protected would be destroyed."***

#### **FUNDAMENTALLY FLAWED E.I.A. MISINTERPRETED MODEL AND FAILED TO CONSULT STAKEHOLDERS**

In addition to the economic report is damning new evidence which casts extreme doubt on the safety of the expansion plan from an environmental perspective. This comes via a [new independent analysis](#) of the strategic environmental impact assessment (SEIA) or EIA performed in 2015 by AMBIO S.A. This new analysis by UK-based Poseidon Aquatic Resource Management reveals several "critical" or "major" weaknesses, including the fact that a serious error was made with the modelling technique used to determine the safety of the plan: this error deemed the expansion 'safe', whereas it should have been classed as 'moderate to severe'. (The technique in question, MERAMOD, is a widely accepted standard for predicting the effects of fish farms.) Given the close proximity of the proposed farms to the local tourist centres, it is especially problematic that no attempt was made by AMBIO to address these potential conflicts.

Eva Douzinas is President of the U.S. based Rauch Foundation, which commissioned the analysis based on a drive to protect the island where her family has lived for centuries. Douzinas explains, ***"The Poseidon analysis of the Poros EIA is enormously significant in the questions it raises. One has to wonder about the contents of other EIA reports and whether they, too, left citizens out of the process. The willingness to promote expansion while the analysis shows that these farms will cause severe environmental impact is frankly unconscionable."***

#### **POLL OF POROS PEOPLE SHOWS FEARS OVER IMPACT ON JOBS, TOURISM and ENVIRONMENT**

The failure to consult local stakeholders and communities as part of the EIA comes as little surprise in the light of results from a recent [poll](#) of 600 residents of Poros and nearby Methana, which found 87% disagreeing with plans to expand fish farms on Poros. Residents fear the ecological consequences of fish farming: 84% estimated the possible expansion of fish farms will negatively affect the situation in most sectors it "touches": seawater quality (84%), the local natural environment (86%), tourism (86%), the local economy (71%) and jobs (62%). (The Poll was initiated by the Rauch Foundation and Katheti, and conducted in July by Athens-based Kapa Research.)

Fish farms are known to have direct, as well as indirect, negative impacts on marine life. The plan threatens wild fish, endangered European Monk Seals (just 700 survive today) and critical Posidonia seagrasses - a protected species in certain regions. Poros's marine life would be hit hard by 16 tons a day of waste fish food and faeces predicted in the original environmental impact studies. (Equivalent to waste from a town of 33,500 people, over ten times Poros according to its Municipality). The small fish farms on Poros currently produce an already extreme 1,100 tons of fish a year, which the owners plan to increase to 8,831 tons in 5 years. Scientists estimate that for every 100 tons of fish produced, 9 tons of polluting nitrates are released into the sea.

The failure to consult communities comes as little surprise to Anthi Giannoulou, a specialist in maritime and environmental law. She notes: ***"A lot of the fish farms in Greece are expanding in areas of great importance to biodiversity, and are protected by European Directives or international Agreements, including Natura 2000 sites and ACCOBAMS-protected areas. Even in these areas, expansion is going ahead without the legally-required studies to prove the carrying capacity of the ecosystem is safeguarded. The vast majority of studies are either incomplete or inconclusive, and clearly supportive of fish-farming. Almost never are plans for the POAY\* rejected. Furthermore, in many cases, entities who conduct the studies as "independent" advisors run and profit from the aquaculture business - they are acting as both 'poacher and gamekeeper'."***

#### **A COMMUNITY UNITED: POROS RESIDENTS HOPE FOR A PROSPEROUS FUTURE FOR ISLAND**

It is unknown when the Greek government will make its final decision about the plan for Poros, but the go-ahead was given earlier this year for the Echinades–Aetoloakarnania, despite the municipality, Xiromero, strongly opposing the fish farms. Unanimous opposition on Poros is still being ignored by the Ministry of the Environment. Yet, despite the fears, Fay Orfanidou remains hopeful. In her words, **“With 87% of locals opposed to the expansion of fish farming, I hope the government will terminate this devastating plan. It presents a net loss for livelihoods, the environment and the character of our treasured island. Perhaps there’ll be room to celebrate on next year’s World Tourism Day if we manage to #SavePoros. For now, we are united by our mission, and we call on others to help stop this ‘net loss’ plan.”**

## REFERENCES

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## AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEW

- Eva Douzinas, President, Rauch Foundation
- [Fay Orfanidou](#), Executive Director, Katheti - non-profit Poros cultural and education centre
- Anthi Giannoulou

**#SavePoros CAMPAIGN ASSETS:** [Documentary](#) | [Photos](#) | [Biographies Press Pack](#) | [Campaign Webpage](#)

**Rauch Foundation** is a U.S. based family foundation that invests in ideas and organisations that spark and sustain positive systemic change. Building on a long history of providing evidence-based research and data to inform policy, its current work is centred on exploring the systems involved in the financing, sourcing, production and delivery of food. The foundation is interested in how global, national, and regional actions impact the health of communities, economies, and the environment.

<http://www.rauchfoundation.org/> | [LinkedIn](#)



**Katheti** is a cultural and educational centre serving the people of the Poros, Troizinia and Methana region. Currently, it is focused on protecting the threatened environment of this region. Katheti supports local artisans, entrepreneurs and students, and those seeking to expand their horizons, learn new skills, share knowledge, and celebrate the richness of local culture. Its mission is to galvanise the deep expertise and creativity resident in the local community, and provide additional resources that encourage sustainable growth. ‘Katheti’ is the traditional fishing gear used by generations of local families, made from rectangular pieces of native cork, a weighted line and simple hooks: a symbol of ingenuity and self-sufficiency. The name reflects the adage: “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime.” <https://katheti.gr/en/> | [LinkedIn](#) | [Instagram](#) | [YouTube](#)



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