The Problems with Pin Bones
Brianne Lyall, University of Tasmania (UTAS)

Gianluca Amoroso¹, Chris Carter¹, Matthew Perrott², Jane Symonds³, Seumas Walker³, Eckhard Witten⁴, Zac Waddington⁵. ¹UTAS, ²Massey University, ³Cawthon Institute, ⁴Ghent University, ⁵New Zealand King Salmon

I embarked on this PhD journey with the Blue Economy CRC to be part of research efforts dedicated to improving the health and welfare of farmed fish.

Beyond my doctoral studies, I aspire to persist in endeavours aimed at enhancing the welfare of aquatic animals, including ongoing research, science communication and working with non-profit organisations focused on aquatic animal welfare.

What are we doing?

Investigating intermuscular bone (IB) development and emerging abnormalities in New Zealand farmed Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*). IBs, commercially known as pin bones, are small spicule-like bones embedded in the muscle fillets of basal teleost species. In farmed fish IBs are recognised for their impact on fish processing, negative effect on the economic value of fish and as a consumer health concern if ingested. Skeletal deformities are a persistent welfare and production problem in salmonid aquaculture, which threatens to impede industry growth. It is very plausible that the underlying mechanism resulting in IB abnormalities is likely compromising skeletal health more broadly.

Aims:

1. Determine when and how IBs develop.
2. Investigate the differences in strength and bone mineral content between normal and abnormal IBs.
3. Understand the influence of commercial production strategies on IB development.
4. Assess the potential of sustained swimming to influence IB strength and mineralisation.
5. Investigate the association between IB development and abnormalities, with spinal curvature and overall skeletal health.

How are we doing it?

• Monitoring the development of IBs and skeletal health of four production groups from hatching to harvest.
• Analysing abnormal IBs from an affected population of harvest sized fish.
• Analysing IBs from salmon subjected to low (0.3 bl s−1) and moderate (0.8 bl s−1) flow regimes for ten to eleven months (Prescott et al. 2023).
• X-ray/mammography of salmon > 10 g.
• Whole-mount staining of salmon < 10 g.
• Tension analysis to measure bone strength.
• Measuring bone mineral content (calcium and phosphorus) using ICP-MS.
• Histology.