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Fish farm causes sea lice abundances thousands of times higher than natural levels, new study confirms

March 29, 2005 -

VANCOUVER – A definitive new study confirming that a B.C. fish farm is responsible for an overwhelming increase in sea lice on wild fish should prompt the government to immediately remove salmon farms from B.C. waters, say members of the Coastal Alliance for Aquaculture Reform (CAAR).

“Until now, government and industry have either denied that sea lice are a problem or called for more research,” says Jay Ritchlin, marine conservation specialist with the David Suzuki Foundation. “Today’s study shows that the link is undeniable – and that the situation is even worse than we had imagined.”

The study is published today in the respected Proceedings of the Royal Society of London, Series B. It examines the Stolt Sea Farms-owned Doctor Islet fish farm, located in B.C.’s Broughton Archipelago.

The results show transmission of lice from farmed salmon to migrating wild salmon peaked at an intensity of 70 times greater than natural near the farm and continued to exceed natural levels for 30km along the migration route. This amounts to a total contribution of lice from the farm that was 30,000 times higher than natural.

“The Doctor Islet farm is typical of the impact open net-pen fish farms are having on wild salmon,” says Chris Genovali, Executive Director of Raincoast Conservation Society. “Open net-pen fish farms are a clear and present danger to BC’s wild salmon. To protect wild stocks, government must require an immediate shift to closed-tank systems.”

The authors of today’s far-reaching study conclude that there is an urgent need to reconsider industrialized salmon farming in wild fish habitat.

There are currently five new salmon farms pending approval in the Broughton Archipelago. These join the 28 existing farms, most of which are located directly on wild pink salmon migration routes.

“To approve these farms in light of today’s study would be unfathomable,” says Jennifer Lash of the Living Oceans Society. “Previous studies from Europe shows that sea lice on juvenile salmon is lethal. Now that we know fish farms are the cause of the lice outbreaks, DFO must place a moratorium on new farms and begin the removal of existing ones from the Broughton Archipelago. Too much time has been wasted already.”

Environmental groups and other concerned community members continue to advocate for the immediate removal of open net pens and a shift to more sustainable forms of fish farming. Closed-tank systems address most of the disease and pollution concerns posed by open net cages.

“We have a small window of opportunity to reverse this damage – by removing open netcages and investing in sustainable, closed-tank technology,” says Ritchlin. “But this window is getting smaller and smaller.”

Support for this research comes from the David Suzuki Foundation, Raincoast Conservation Society, Raincoast Research Society, several National Science and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) grants, a Canada Research Chair and a Walter H. Johns Graduate Fellowship.

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Backgrounder: [Transmission Dynamics of Parasitic Sea Lice from Farm to Wild Salmon, by Martin Krkošek \(PDF\)](#)

Additional information on this study will be made available at: www.math.ualberta.ca/~mlewis/SeaLice/npSeaLicePub.htm

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