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## Sea lice from salmon farms leading to ecological disaster

**January 28, 2003** - Broughton Archipelago, British Columbia – Negotiations to ensure the survival of wild pink salmon off the northeast coast of Vancouver Island have broken down between First Nations, conservationists, the fish-farm industry and government, because industry refuses to adequately address sea-lice outbreaks around their farms, say local First Nations and conservationists.

An unprecedented outbreak of sea lice at salmon farms in this region decimated eight runs of pink salmon in 2001 - putting them on the brink of extinction – and the fish-farm industry refuses to provide safe passage for wild salmon around their farms to help ensure their survival, the groups say.

“Unless we can provide a minimum of one safe migration route for young pink salmon as they make their way from the rivers out to sea, we can say goodbye to these vital salmon stocks, which support populations of bears, whales, other salmon species, and even the forests,” says Alexandra Morton of Raincoast Research.

“Without a safe, disease-free way to sea, the salmon will be infested with lice again and they will be lost forever,” she added.

Urgent action is required because pink salmon could begin their migration to sea as early as the last week of February yet industry has not developed a suitable action plan, say First Nations leaders.

“Salmon-farming companies are not welcome here. They nearly wiped out the wild pink salmon and now they are refusing to help save them,” says Brian Wadhams of the Musgamagw Twawataineuk Tribal Council (MTTC).

“This is a slap in the face for First Nations rights, title, and culture. We don’t want them in our traditional territories,” he said.

Two companies, Stolt Sea Farms and Heritage Aquaculture, operate 27 farms in the Broughton Archipelago, and all they need to do is leave fish pens on at least one wild salmon migration route empty from February to July.

“I don’t think that is too much to ask,” said Jennifer Lash of Living Oceans Society. “All we are asking for is a minimum of one safe migration route so the few remaining pink salmon can make it to sea safely so that we have wild pink salmon here in the future.”

Neither company will agree to leave fish pens empty, or fallow, on even one pink-salmon migration route. Instead they want to treat the fish in their farms with a pesticide called Slice, which is put into the food pellets fed to the farm fish.

“Scientists around the world have acknowledged that treating sea-lice outbreaks with pesticides does not work,” says Morton. “And using Slice will not keep wild fish swimming past the pens lice-free so this is not a solution.”

Studies show that Slice can be harmful to shellfish so the possible effect on local shrimp and crabs is unknown, says Morton who is a registered professional biologist.

Representatives from local communities (like Gilford Island, Port McNeil and Alert Bay), First Nations, fishermen’s and conservation groups are trying to get the provincial and federal fisheries departments to act in the interest of wild salmon and not that of industry.

As well as the David Suzuki Foundation, Raincoast Research, Living Oceans Society, and the Musgamagw Twawataineuk Tribal Council are members of the Coastal Alliance for Aquaculture Reform (CAAR), a group of conservation and First Nations organizations dedicated to reforming the salmon-farming industry. Visit [www.farmedanddangerous.org](http://www.farmedanddangerous.org) for more information.

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