

OPEN LETTER TO NEWFOUNDLAND AQUACULTURE INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION



Newfoundland Aquaculture Industry Association
29-31 Pippy Place, Suite 3007
St. John's, NL
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RE: A challenge to the aquaculture industry in Newfoundland and Labrador

The recent release by the Federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans of their latest Atlantic salmon stock assessment acknowledged the dramatic decline of stocks on the south coast of Newfoundland, centered in the Fortune Bay-Bay d'Espoir region. Not coincidentally this is the epicentre of the salmonid aquaculture industry in this province. While there are indeed many reasons for the decline in salmon stocks around the North Atlantic, it is clear that wherever and whenever sea pen salmon farms are placed close to salmon rivers or migration routes, wild Atlantic salmon disappear. It has happened and is well documented in Norway, Scotland, the Bay of Fundy and on the south coast of Newfoundland. Populations of wild Atlantic salmon in all these areas haven't declined, they have disappeared.

The aquaculture industry in Newfoundland and Labrador has always categorically stated, most recently by your Executive Director in reaction to the recent DFO presentation that "...there is no evidence that aquaculture negatively impacts wild Atlantic salmon." This is blatantly false and there is plenty of evidence from DFO's own scientists on those impacts on our own south coast as well as a substantial body of evidence from other areas in both Canada and overseas.

At present, there are no fish farms in Placentia Bay but current plans by NAIA member Grieg NL Seafarms Ltd. will see up 11 sites established, each with multiple cages. Placentia Bay has almost 30 scheduled salmon rivers, most of which, anecdotally at least, are relatively healthy. There is only one counting fence in place in Placentia Bay, on the Northeast Placentia River, and to date there have been no studies on rivers throughout the Bay which may be damaged by the establishment of those fish farms. SAEN's challenge to NAIA and it's members is therefore, to put it colloquially, "put your money where your mouth is." As an industry body, on your own or in partnership with various levels of government, Memorial University and community groups, commit to funding a long term study on wild Atlantic Salmon stocks in Placentia Bay. This should entail as a minimum, counting fences on representative rivers near fish farm sites, genetic studies to track changes in salmon populations attributable to interbreeding with aquaculture escapees and preferably, smolt counting and tracking studies to clarify migration routes and the impact of sea lice blooms associated with open net pen salmonid aquaculture.

NAIA, the ball is in your court. If you and your members truly believe that open pen salmonid aquaculture has no negative impacts on wild Atlantic salmon, here's your chance to prove it.

Robert Bishop
President
Salmonid Association of Eastern Newfoundland