

ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS COMMEND SALMON FORUM'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF FISH FARM PROBLEMS, DEMAND GOVERNMENT ACTION ON KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

For Immediate Release

February 5, 2009, Vancouver, BC: The Coastal Alliance for Aquaculture Reform (CAAR) today commended the Pacific Salmon Forum on the release of their long-anticipated report. The report frankly acknowledges the magnitude of the problems created by open net-cage salmon farms on the BC coast, calls for better environmental protection, and recommends that the Provincial government get on with funding a commercial-scale closed containment project.

CAAR representatives were also pleased the Forum members and Scientific Advisory Committee advocate for greater industry transparency and sweeping reforms in aquaculture management practices, particularly the call for closed containment.

“With the usual state of denial, disinterest, and inaction, it’s gratifying to finally see recognition of sea lice impacts,” said Craig Orr of the Watershed Watch Salmon Society. “Now we need action, given the extremely dire state of Broughton pink and chum wild salmon.”

While pleased with the general tone of the report, the CAAR groups also noted some serious concerns. The Forum’s proposal of an Ecosystem Based Management approach for watersheds and the marine environment, while welcome, depends almost entirely on full cooperation between the Province and the Federal government for implementation. To date, there has been little unity between the two levels of government on marine planning initiatives.

The report places a strong reliance on the use of Coordinated Area Management Plans (CAMP) for salmon farms, such as currently being proposed for the Broughton Archipelago, but fails to acknowledge that CAMP is only an interim measure designed to mitigate the impact on migrating juvenile wild salmon until a more lasting and ecologically sound technology is fully adopted. The Broughton CAMP cannot be effectively implemented unless some amendments to licenses are approved, and fails to address the broader ecosystem impacts of open net-cage farming such as the contamination of clam beds and the effects of farm pesticide use on prawns and other marine species.

“While we welcome many of the Forum’s recommendations, they are only proposals,” said Catherine Stewart of Living Oceans Society. “Nothing is going to change unless the Provincial and Federal governments take strong and immediate action to address the threats posed by salmon farms. This report is a call to action – the question now is whether it will gather dust alongside all the previous aquaculture recommendations.”

CAAR representatives noted concerns with certain details in the report, including a continued reliance on Slice™ (emamectin benzoate, a pesticide used to treat sea lice on farmed fish), and an implication that only exceptionally small juvenile pink and chum salmon may be at risk from lice. Much larger smolts of other salmon species have succumbed to sea lice in Europe.

“The recommendation that Health Canada be encouraged to licence Slice™ and other drugs is worrisome,” said Michael Price of Raincoast Conservation Foundation. “Licensing a biocide not recommended for use in water will not solve the problem of the industry’s reliance on drugs and chemicals or the impact of these treatments on other species.”

Overall, CAAR is pleased that the Forum’s report acknowledges the many serious issues surrounding open net-cage salmon farms on the BC coast. But given the track record of successive governments in BC, the entrenched support for fish farming at the Federal level and the Campbell Liberals’ failure to acknowledge the weight of scientific evidence on the risks posed by open net-cages, will governments finally act? The first test will be the inclusion of closed containment funding in the upcoming 2009 Provincial budget.

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