

Move fish farms out of public waters

by Inka Milewski — June 7, 2011 Reading Time: 2min read

In a commentary in the *Telegraph – Journal* (May 26), a spokesperson for the Atlantic Canada Fish Farmers Association asked the question: “why would we want to grow salmon in an unnatural closed system when we can grow them in a natural environment, uncrowded and using minimal energy?”

The answer is simple. Since there is nothing natural about fish being trapped in netpens, fed food pellets laced with chemicals or being bathed in pesticides, it’s time to move these operations out of public waters and stop the salmon industry’s ecological and economic free-ride.

Open netpen salmon farms operate like industrial feedlots in our coastal waters. They generate large quantities of wastes and the cost of waste disposal is paid by the environment and not the industry. Recent scientific studies indicate that waste from salmon farms is not diluted and can have negative bay-wide ecological impacts. In addition, the wide-range of drugs and pesticides needed to grow salmon in feedlot conditions are known to have impacts on species beyond the netpens.

The physical and environmental footprint of salmon grown in open netpens can destroy, displace and disrupt habitat for other species like lobster and migratory fish. While the industry may claim

that the area of the ocean they occupy is small, Department of Fisheries and Oceans habitat regulators believe any alteration, disruption or destruction of just 100 square metres of seabottom is enough to trigger regulatory action.

Year-to-year, environmental monitoring results from fish farms in New Brunswick show that at least 20 percent of salmon feedlots are routinely required by the provincial government to undertake some kind of remediation because the seabottom under their netpens has become so toxic that 60 to 70 per cent of biological diversity has been lost. Surprisingly and disappointingly, DFO only steps in with enforcement action when 70 to 90 per cent is lost.

The salmon industry need not be baffled as to why they are being asked to move their operations onto land. They have created unnatural feedlots in the oceans. Our coastal waters are not limitless in their capacity to absorb all of the waste salmon feedlots produce nor is there limitless habitat for commercial and non-commercial species, many of which have specific habitat needs.

If federal regulators are serious about their mandate to protect ocean habitat and the species that inhabit it, DFO needs to immediately begin developing plans to transition salmon feedlots from the sea to land where the industry will finally have to pay for the real cost of farming salmon.

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