

Lousy B.C. farmed salmon enter market with ASC stamp of approval

May 11, 2018

VANCOUVER — The Aquaculture Stewardship Council is eco-certifying salmon from B.C. farms with alarmingly high lice loads. Fish from farms with sea lice counts as high as 149 times the level ASC allows are being sold with the scheme’s “farmed responsibly” logo.

SeaChoice is calling on the ASC to immediately suspend Cermaq Canada’s Dixon Bay, Millar Channel and Ross Pass farms from using the eco-label and to eliminate the variance that allows B.C. farms to avoid ASC’s original sea lice requirements.

Seven of Cermaq Canada’s Clayoquot Sound farms report elevated lice loads up to 10 times Fisheries and Oceans Canada’s management threshold. Five are ASC-certified and one is in assessment. Three of the ASC-certified farms are actively harvesting with sea lice counts ranging from 24 to 31 lice per fish. Meanwhile, scientists have reported wild juvenile salmon in the area are infected with up to 20 lice per fish. Such high lice infections can be fatal to young migrating salmon.

“Fish from these ASC-certified farms are being marketed as environmentally responsible. In reality, they’re endangering wild salmon,” said Living Oceans Society executive director Karen Wristen.

B.C. salmon farms are allowed variances from the ASC’s established lice limits. The written requirement is that lice levels should be controlled at 0.1 female lice per fish while wild juvenile salmon are migrating. In practice, no upper limit on total lice abundance, or on lice per fish, is applied.

“Clearly, the high lice loads at Cermaq’s ASC-certified farms demonstrate that the intent of the sea lice indicator — which is to protect migrating juvenile salmonids from farm-generated increases in lice — is being undermined by variances,” said David Suzuki Foundation senior science and policy adviser John Werring.

“ASC-approved variances allow B.C. salmon farms, which would otherwise not meet the ASC salmon standard, to be certified,” said Kelly Roebuck, SeaChoice representative from the Living Oceans Society. The society has submitted two formal complaints disputing the variances. “There is an urgent need for the ASC to rectify these sea lice variances. Unfortunately, the ASC has not acted,” Roebuck said.

A 2017 SeaChoice report found the process ASC uses to consider varying the criteria for certification is secretive and lacking in stakeholder engagement. The nature of some variances overrides the multi-stakeholder agreements on which the standard’s social licence is based. The report raised questions about whether the approval process is fully compliant with best practices as defined by the ISEAL Alliance (an international body that seeks to maintain credibility among certification standards).

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SeaChoice:

SeaChoice is a collaboration of three internationally recognized organizations — the David Suzuki Foundation, Ecology Action Centre and Living Oceans Society — that use their broad, national expertise to find solutions for healthy oceans. SeaChoice is a science-based, solutions-focused influencer, advocate and watchdog leading the next evolution of seafood sustainability in Canada. SeaChoice is a member organization of the Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions, and works with consumers, retailers, suppliers, government and producers to accomplish its objectives.

SeaChoice member groups have been active stakeholders in the ASC and Salmon Aquaculture Dialogue for more than a decade. This has included steering committee representation during the original Aquaculture Dialogues, core participation in numerous ASC advisory and working groups, and active stakeholder engagement on ASC audits and projects.

Backgrounder:

The ASC salmon standard

The ASC salmon standard was created in 2012 following a multi-stakeholder process known as the Salmon Aquaculture Dialogue. The standard is assessed by criteria to eliminate or minimize the environmental and social impacts of aquaculture. Third-party auditing companies assess farm clients against the standard and to grant certification. Version 1.1 of the standard was published in May 2017. Further information: www.asc-aqua.org

ASC variances and process

Variance requests allow third-party auditors to seek an ASC interpretation of, or variance from, either a salmon standard criterion or auditor requirements. The variance request process can be used for any of the eight ASC standards. Of the 263 variance requests currently listed on the ASC website, as of May 10, 2018, 138 apply to the salmon standard alone.

The ASC approved sea lice variances

Granted sea lice variances (no. 88 and 141) defer to Fisheries and Oceans' Pacific Aquaculture Regulation, which allows three motile *L. salmonis* per fish instead of the salmon standard's threshold of 0.1 female lice per fish during sensitive wild fish migration periods. The variance has been applied to benefit *all* B.C. salmon farms. Audit evidence shows auditors routinely cite the variance number and the PAR regime, but no compliance with a metric threshold is required. Further information:

www.seachoice.org/our-work/eco-labels/asc-variances-and-process
www.seachoice.org/our-work/eco-labels/whats-behind-the-label-report

Cermaq Canada's sea lice counts

Sea lice counts from the ASC-certified and in assessment Clayoquot Sound farms:

- Ross Pass — [31.88 motile per fish](#) / 14.9 adult female per fish (1 May 2018) HARVESTING
- Dixon Bay — [24.83 motile per fish](#) / 13.07 adult female per fish (28 April 2018) HARVESTING
- Millar Channel — [29.13 motile per fish](#) / 8.07 adult female per fish (29 April 2018) HARVESTING
- Saranac — [18.47 motile per fish](#) / 5 adult female per fish (29 April 2018)
- Mussel Rock — [8.67 motile per fish](#) / 4.53 adult female per fish (28 April 2018)
- Bawden — [18.82 motile per fish](#) / 10.97 adult female per fish (25 April 2018)

Clayoquot Sound Juvenile Wild Salmon with Sea Lice – May 2018

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<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/g1kdx1ot0xe3ebm/AACM4AxzVlidKJuqhA7W9yfYa?dl=0>



