

Suspension of Clayoquot salmon farm certifications: What's next?

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

VANCOUVER — SeaChoice was gratified to see Aquaculture Stewardship Certifications suspended for five salmon farms in Clayoquot Sound, where sea lice levels soared to 34 per fish earlier in May. The group expressed concern, however, that ongoing uncertainty about effective sea lice management will continue to frustrate efforts to ensure that certified farms are operating in a manner that protects wild salmon. SeaChoice has asked ASC to rescind the variances it has granted to B.C. farms to allow them to avoid compliance with the ASC sea lice limit of 0.1 female lice per fish.

Wild juvenile salmon beginning their migration past the Clayoquot farms to sea were found to have lice loads as high as 20 per fish earlier in May, when SeaChoice called for certifications to be suspended. Lice loads this high are lethal to immature fish.

“The salmon being raised on these farms ought not to be marketed with the ASC eco-label. We are pleased to see the Aquaculture Stewardship Council and industry auditors responded to our call for a review of the farms in Clayoquot Sound,” said Kelly Roebuck, sustainable seafood campaigner for SeaChoice member Living Oceans Society. “However, at least 15 farms in B.C. have experienced extremely high lice levels during the sensitive period for outmigrating wild salmonids, and we believe none of these farms ought to have been entitled to market fish with the ASC label while sea lice control remains an issue.”

ASC’s announcement Saturday indicates that the farming company, Cermaq, agreed to the suspensions pending an investigation to determine whether or not the company took all available steps to remain compliant with the ASC standard. “This raises a question about what the ASC standard is,” said Living Oceans executive director Karen Wristen. “The ASC varied its lice standard for B.C. but has failed to provide auditors with guidance as to how and when that variance can be used. The net result is that there is no effective limit on sea lice levels on certified farms.”

SeaChoice acknowledges that it would not even have known of the sea lice problem if the farms were not certified by ASC. “Thankfully, reporting of sea lice levels in a timely fashion is a requirement of the certification scheme,” said John Werring, senior science and policy adviser with the David Suzuki Foundation. “If this was not the case, we would have missed this whole thing. Our only other source of information regarding sea lice infestations on B.C. farms is Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and it will not publish this information until sometime this fall. That would have been too late for anyone to evaluate the situation and take action to protect wild salmon.”

SeaChoice has been critical of DFO for failing to monitor impacts of sea lice on wild salmonids and to require farms to keep regional lice loads under control while wild juvenile salmon are passing through.

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219-2211 West 4th Avenue
Vancouver, BC
Canada
V6K 4S2

Media contacts:

Kelly Roebuck, Living Oceans Society: Skype – kmroebuck; email – kroebuck@livingoceans.org

Karen Wristen, Living Oceans Society: Cell – 604-788-5634

John Werring, David Suzuki Foundation: Cell – 604-306-0517

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.



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