



Fisheries and Oceans Pêches et Océans
Canada Canada



FEB 10 2004

Notre référence - Our file

A-2003-00526 / mfb

Mr. John Cummins, M.P.
Room 548
Confederation Building
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. Cummins:

We have completed processing the request you submitted under the *Access to Information Act* for:

"...copy of all documents prepared for the Minister, any Ministerial briefing book or for the Ottawa headquarters of the department including all departmental documents received by the Minister or the Ottawa headquarters in December 2003 involving development of sablefish aquaculture including economic impacts on wild sablefish industry, environmental impacts on wild sablefish and their habitat and necessary approvals and investigations under the Fisheries Act, Navigable Waters Protection Act, and Canadian Environmental Assessment Act."

Please find enclosed the complete release package in response to this request. The exemption provisions s. 21(1)(a) and 21(1)(c) of the Act have been applied to the package. A copy of the relevant sections is attached.

The *Access to Information Act* grants you the right to file a complaint with the Information Commissioner if you are not satisfied with our handling of your request. The address is:

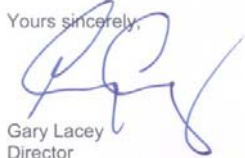
Office of the Information Commissioner
112 Kent Street, 22nd Floor
Place de Ville, Tower B
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 1H3

200 Kent Street
Ottawa, Canada
K1A 0E6

Canada

If you have any questions regarding this request, do not hesitate to contact
Marlene Fournier, at (613) 991-6724.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'GL', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Gary Lacey
Director
Access to Information and Privacy

Enclosures (15 pages)

BACKGROUND

The backlog of finfish aquaculture site applications in BC represents over 100 applications. These include over 200 applications for tenure renewal, approximately 10 site relocations and approximately 10 new site applications.

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It is likely that the majority of the proposed sites will require a formal approval under the *Navigable Waters Protection Act*, and therefore trigger screening level assessments under the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* (CEAA). There have been numerous delays associated with the CEAA process due to complex environmental concerns and the difficulty in collecting the information required to complete the assessments.

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Industry has put a higher priority on obtaining approvals for new and relocating sites. Renewal sites are seen as less of a concern due to the fact that they remain in the water and in production, while new and relocating sites must wait for all approvals before commencing operation.

This year, Pacific Region Habitat Management has succeeded in completing assessments for 2 priority site applications. In addition, ongoing process and administrative improvements are being made based on the successes of completed assessments.

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Site renewal applications have not progressed recently, due mostly to the lack of environmental information provided by proponents upon which to base an assessment. DFO requests for additional information on these sites have largely been ignored by proponents.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE

DFO considers the backlog of aquaculture site applications in BC to be a priority issue.

DFO has embarked on an Action Plan to address the application backlog, including the formation of a focussed blitz team and development of a framework for assessing renewal applications.

To date significant progress has been made with the completion of assessments of 2 priority site applications.

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DFO also recognizes the importance of collaborating with industry and provincial representatives to ensure that all data required to complete environmental assessments can be collected and assessed effectively and efficiently.

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