

Federal Politics

Hundreds heed Morton's call

By **Colleen Kimmett** October 3, 2009 05:58 pm

The salmon were out in full force at a rally in downtown Vancouver today.

On hats, t-shirts, posters and chalked on the steps of the art gallery square, where hundreds showed up to protest fish farms off B.C.'s coast.

"This is just the power of the people," Tyee Bridge, one of the organizers, told The Tyee. He said approximately 600 people were counted, representing the commercial fishery, wilderness tourism, government, first nations – as well as many people with no vested interest in wild salmon.

Bridge, and eleven others who call themselves the Wild Salmon Circle, are responsible for bringing together this network. Their goal is to pressure the federal and provincial governments to take the precautionary principle with aquaculture management: if sea lice from fish farms could be killing wild salmon, why take the risk?

It's a message that environmental organizations and independent scientists have so far not been able to convince Fisheries Minister Gail Shea of. Her department maintains that there is no correlation between fish farms and sea lice infection amongst young, wild salmon.

"No politician can stand up and change this, they need you" biologist Alexandra Morton told the crowd.

In June, Morton issued a **letter** over several newsgroups, telling British Columbians "If you want wild salmon in British Columbia, you will need to roar all the way from Campbell River to Parliament Hill in Ottawa..."

Peter Julian, fisheries critic for the federal NDP, said bureaucrats within the Department of Fisheries (DFO) are aware of problems.

"We're not seeing DFO approach it because they don't have the resources, because the administration is done from Ottawa and because the Conservatives are directing them in another direction," Julian told The Tyee.

"People, when you talk to them privately, will admit that there's huge administrative problems, that the precautionary principle should be brought to bear. Publicly if they say that they'll lose their jobs."