

The Vancouver Sun (Community of Interest blogs)

# Judicial Inquiry of sockeye salmon collapse

By Alexandra Morton  
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There must be a judicial inquiry into Fisheries and Oceans Canada's handling of the Fraser River sockeye crash. Statements by Minister of Fisheries, Gail Shea and Regional Director General (Pacific) Paul Sprout to exempt salmon farm companies from the investigation into this crash are misleading. The current situation bears disturbing resemblance to the same department's inactions that culminated in the commercial extinction of Canada's North Atlantic cod. Hutchings et al. (1997) critique of Federal Fisheries on this include:

Misinformed the public on the science on the state of the cod stock

1. Reprimanded their own scientists who tried to speak freely
2. Offered plausible but wrong theories that allowed continued inaction
3. Did not take recommended action

No one was held accountable for demise of one of earth's largest human food resources. Today, the highest levels of Fisheries and Oceans Canada are exonerating salmon farms using plausible but wrong arguments before the investigation on the collapse of the world's largest sockeye salmon river has even begun.

Specifically:

August 26, 2009 Minister Gail Shea sent multiple copies of a letter to citizens stating:

“The coastwide scope of the decline that has occurred across all Pacific salmon species suggests that this decline [Fraser sockeye] is associated with much larger ecological events than localized salmon farming. These events include climate change and changes in ocean productivity along our West Coast. “

**FACT:** On August 26, 2009 it was widely known that there had not been a coast-wide collapse of all Pacific salmon species.

On August 15, 2009 Mr. Paul Sprout, published a letter to the editor of the Globe and Mail stating:

“Sea lice from fish farms are not the explanation for this year's extremely poor marine survival of Fraser sockeye. ... The sea lice species found on juvenile sockeye in the Strait of Georgia are not the same species that typically infects farmed salmon.”

FACT: In spring/summer 2007, when the missing sockeye went to sea as smolts, over 90% of the Marine Harvest salmon farms on the Fraser migration route reported presence of this species of louse.

Mr. Sprout repeats this again in the North Island Gazette September 3, 2009.

We cannot know at this point if salmon farms destroyed millions of Fraser sockeye, but they are a factor that bears close scrutiny including disease occurrence.

Sockeye runs near the Fraser River that did not pass salmon farms including; Columbia River to the south, and Somass River to the west survived better than forecast. Even within the Fraser River, the Harrison sockeye, reported to migrate via fish farm-free Juan de Fuca, came in at twice the DFO forecast. Only the sockeye stocks that migrated past 60 salmon farm sites failed at over 90%. Fisheries and Oceans Canada has never mentioned this publicly.

It is my opinion that Fisheries and Ocean Canada's (recent and past) incomplete and inaccurate information to the public regarding salmon farming is threatening wild salmon of the eastern Pacific. There have been a plethora of scientific papers, government and environmental group reviews listing recommendations that have been critically ignored. It is my observation, as a resident and a scientist, that Fisheries and Oceans Canada is not honoring their original mandate to protect wild fish and that this will not be corrected without the highest level legal inquiry. I believe there are scientists, including myself, who should be questioned under oath on the science and review process that leads to publication of the science. One very critical and urgent episode is Minister Gail Shea's March 11, 2009 assertion in a letter to me that there is no strong evidence that ISAV (fish virus) is transmitted via eggs, in support of continued farm salmon egg imports into British Columbia. Scientific papers report the opposite conclusion and it is believed that the devastating ISAV outbreak in Chile arrived in farm salmon eggs. Virologists report impact of this virus would likely be devastating and irreversible to naïve BC wild salmon stocks.

The fundamental issue at stake is Canadians', present and future, right to the economic, ecological, food-security and social benefits of wild salmon. Fisheries and Oceans Canada has two conflicting mandates to protect wild salmon and promote salmon farms. This is not working. Farm salmon have a far reduced habitat requirement, in particular they do not require the rivers where 600 applications have been made to divert water for power production at 720 separate diversion points.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada's handling of marine fish farms is not only inadequate, it is following the pattern of behavior that led to demise of an extremely valuable fishery resource in eastern Canada and global food resource. A judicial inquiry with binding recommendations is essential to prevent repeat of that here in western Canada.

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