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## **Irish Experience Suggests Fish Farms May Be Cause of Pink Salmon Collapse in B.C.**

**OTTAWA**— “The Irish experience would suggest that the collapse of pink salmon stocks in British Columbia this year may be linked directly to the fish farms located on key coastal migration routes,” said John Cummins, M.P. (Delta-South Richmond).

Sea lice swarming around fish farms may form deadly obstacles through which wild salmon from rivers adjacent to the Broughton Archipelago must swim when they undertake their migration to the sea.

A decade ago sea trout stocks collapsed mysteriously in Ireland. All the usual suspects were trotted out by scientists: over-fishing, forest practices, predation, the weather, food chain problems, migratory stress, disease, plus the novel idea of a sea lice infestation from salmon farms.

After considerable study and analysis, Irish scientists found no evidence of a disease or environmental factor which would trigger a stock collapse. The only consistent link to the disappearance of the sea trout was the high concentration of sea lice found in all fish farms.

In the later half of the 1980's, salmon farm production in the bays on the west coast of Ireland expanded dramatically. Sea lice levels soared. The Irish sea trout lice infestation and stock collapse were only observed in the areas of intensive salmon farming

In their studies scientists identified three vital pieces of evidence:

- young sea trout migrating by farms on their way to the sea were consistently infested with lice sufficient to kill them,
- 95% of the sea lice causing the problem were of fish farm origin, and
- of the 60 plus rivers sampled around the coast of Ireland between 1991 and 1996, the sea trout lice infestation and stock collapse was, without exception, recorded only in areas where salmon farming was taking place.

“The difference between the Irish and Canadian experience with sea lice infestations and stock collapse is; where the Irish government scientists speak and write openly about the problem and the work they have undertaken to gain control over the devastation of fish stocks by lice from salmon farms, the Canadian government denies there is a problem.”

“In Canada our fisheries department promotes salmon farming on salmon migratory routes in British Columbia, while denying that salmon farms can, if not properly sited and regulated, create a wall of death for young migrating salmon,” Cummins stated.

“When young salmon migrate out of their rivers of origin into saltwater we must not require them to pass through deadly swarms of farm-based sea lice. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans has ignored the painful lessons learned by others and seems intent on repeating their mistakes. The Minister must put in place a regulatory framework that would site farms away from key migration routes and would ensure a lice-free period in the spring when young salmon move into saltwater bays and estuaries on their way to the ocean,” concluded Cummins.

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# News Release

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