



John Cummins
Official Opposition Critic
Fisheries and Oceans

News Release

December 16, 2003

Fisheries Minister Mised Washington State Senator Kohl-Welles

OTTAWA– The following letter was sent today to the new Fisheries Minister.

In a letter to your predecessor Fisheries Minister Robert Thibault, Washington State Senator Jeanne Kohl-Welles requested that Canada not permit the development and expansion of sablefish aquaculture “without first undertaking comprehensive environmental and socio-economic impact assessments.”

In his response the Minister mised Senator Jeanne Kohl-Welles. In an August 12, 2003 letter Canada’s Minister of Fisheries and Oceans wrongly advises that Canada undertakes thorough environmental and economic risk assessments of the effects of the development and expansion of net pen sablefish aquaculture in British Columbia’s coastal waters.

That the Minister misled Senator Kohl-Welles was confirmed by departmental documents released to me under Canada’s *Access to Information Act* which state clearly that no environmental or economic assessments have been undertaken.

In response to a question as to whether a comprehensive economic impact and cost/benefit analysis of halibut and sablefish aquaculture had been undertaken a departmental document states:

“The short answer is no, no economic analysis has been requested or performed on these aquaculture species.”

The departmental documents indicate that there is already one sablefish net pen site and hatchery in operation.

With regard to environmental assessments under the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*, a Briefing Note prepared for the Minister indicates that the only environmental assessments being undertaken involve salmon even though applications to culture sablefish have been received in the form of species amendment notices from provincial officials. The Ministerial Briefing Note then goes on to advise that “where such species amendments are requested reviews can be revisited and changed if necessary.”

Such a fraudulent manipulation of environmental assessments is contrary to the statutory requirements of the *Environmental Assessment Act*.

Senator Kohl-Welles should have been told the truth: that no environmental or economic assessments have been undertaken, that an open net pen sablefish farm site is already in operation and that a risk assessment is required under Canadian environmental law but the law has been ignored.

As Canada’s new Minister of Fisheries it is incumbent upon you to correct the misconceptions created by your predecessor and to advise Senator Kohl-Welles of the facts of the matter. You should also undertake to ensure that your responsibilities to protect Canada’s wild fish and their habitat are not compromised.

Contact: John Cummins, M.P.
(604) 940-8040 or cell (604) 970-0937