

A Desperate Need for Change

Suzanne Connell

In July, I was fortunate to coordinate a trip to the Broughton Archipelago with world-renowned fisheries biologist, Dr. Daniel Pauly, his wife Sandra Wade Pauly and his colleague, Dr. Reg Watson. They graciously agreed to visit the area in order to meet Alexandra Morton and "bear witness" to the sea lice infestations that she has discovered on juvenile salmon in the area. In 2003, the provincial government closed several fish farms in the Broughton, and the following spring saw a drastic reduction in sea lice. However, in 2004, the government refused to take the same action, and these esteemed fisheries scientists came to see the result.

Alexandra took us out in her boat and caught some young pink and chum salmon directly across from an active salmon farm operation. The tiny fish were covered in sea lice, which for me was a heartbreaking sight and confirmation that action must be taken immediately to protect these young fish from sea lice, which multiply rapidly on salmon farms. The Coastal Alliance for Aquaculture Reform, of which GSA is a member, is calling for the removal of all net pens in the Broughton Archipelago by December 31 to safeguard the spring seaward migration of young wild salmon through the area.

LOCAL CONCERNS GAIN MOMENTUM

In early September we wrote a comprehensive submission to Fisheries and Oceans Canada detailing our opposition to a proposed salmon farm at Ahlstrom Point (Jervis Inlet). You can view this at <http://www.georgiastrait.org/Articles2004/ahlstrom.php>.

Over the summer and fall our interim local outreach coordinator, Patrick Walshe (who has been filling in for Eric Blueschke who's been on leave of absence), has been helping residents of the Sunshine Coast in their opposition to proposed salmon farms in their area. In October he helped organize a successful meeting with members of the Sliammon First Nation and other residents of the area, to begin drawing up a strategy to stop a proposed farm at Raven Bay. For more info contact Eric at 250-334-0095 (eric@georgiastrait.org).

AUDITORS GENERAL HIT HARD

On October 26 the Auditors General of Canada, British Columbia and New Brunswick released three separate reports on salmon issues, which were developed concurrently for the first time ever. All three reports noted there

is no comprehensive plan to manage salmon and salmon farms in Canada. In the BC report, Auditor General Wayne Strelieff called on the provincial government to "become more active in protecting and restoring fish habitat" and highlighted the government's lack of a common vision and strategy for management of wild salmon.

The Auditors also reported significant gaps in scientific information about the potential effects of salmon farming. The federal Auditor General's report made specific reference to Fisheries and Oceans' response to the "suspected outbreak of sea lice in the Broughton Archipelago in 2001" and found that the agency "had not done sufficient research to explore the potential impacts of

aquaculture and sea lice prior to the alleged outbreak" and "has still not provided clear answers about the potential effect of sea lice on wild salmon stocks and its relation to salmon aquaculture."

This confirms what GSA has been saying for years: that government is lacking information about disease transfer between farmed and wild fish, the impacts of escaped farmed salmon and the cumulative impacts of salmon farming. These reports are a damning testament to the government's approach to regulating salmon farms, and point to a desperate need for change. The reports are available at:

<http://www.bcauditor.com/AuditorGeneral.htm>

<http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/>

<http://www.gnb.ca/OAG-BVG/Index.htm>

BRINGING WALKER HOOK INTO THE LIGHT

Over the past year, local citizens and First Nations have worked hard to bring a proposed plan for Walker Hook into the open. Sablefin Hatcheries, who operate BC's only farmed sablefish (black cod) hatchery at Walker Hook on Salt Spring Island, have applied to the BC government for a permanent Waste Management Permit. The company is asking the government to allow them to pump approximately 2,618 cubic meters of fish hatchery sewage into the tomolo at Walker Hook.

The Penelakut First Nation is strongly opposed to the hatchery, especially since during the process of excavating this area, skeletal remains of their ancestors were disturbed and removed. In addition to the cultural significance of Walker Hook as a First Nations burial ground, the area contains three rare and sensitive ecosystems considered



Dr. Daniel Pauly, Suzanne Connell and Alexandra Morton with lice-infested smolts.

Photo: Dr. Reg Watson