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Capitalism and an Impending Wild Salmon Apocalypse

by Kim Petersen / December 22nd, 2007

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If nothing changes, we are going to lose these fish.

– Martin Krkošek, lead author on *Science* paper warning of impending collapse of wild pink salmon population

That sea lice from salmon farming pens imperil wild salmon populations is known.¹ A recent article in the respected academic journal *Science* has confirmed these earlier reports.² But more ominously, the article authors warn that the sea lice threaten a “99% collapse in pink salmon population ... expected in four salmon generations.” The culprit is corporate salmon farming whose pens provide a platform where the sea lice can proliferate. The wild juvenile pink salmon that venture to the sea past these salmon farms are at risk of picking up sea lice.

Lead author Martin Krkošek and his colleagues concluded:

- Pink salmon populations known to be experiencing sea lice infestations were depressed and declining whereas the other populations remained productive.
- If sea lice infestations continue, affected pink salmon populations will collapse by 99 percent in a further two salmon generations (four years).



The
Military
Death
Toll
While
Enforcing
the
Occupation
of Iraq
by Paul de Rooij

Updated 22 August 2007

A regularly updated resource with links to many articles, quotes, and important information missing from mainstream news coverage about the war in Iraq.

- The sea lice typically killed over 80 percent of the fish in each salmon run.³

To isolate sea lice from other factors affecting pink salmon populations, the researchers used data from the Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans that enumerate adult salmon returning to BC rivers each year since 1970. The data allowed researchers to compare populations of pink salmon exposed and unexposed to salmon farms.

In a press release, Krkošek and his co-authors calculated that sea lice have killed more than 80 percent of the annual pink salmon (*Onchorhynchus gorbuscha*) returns to British Columbia's [Broughton Archipelago](#).⁴

The authors' results indicate wild salmon populations are endangered and suggest that large-scale aquaculture should be carefully considered for its effect on wild species.

The Broughton Archipelago has an "80-kilometer gauntlet of fish farms" that juvenile salmon must negotiate on the way to the open ocean. Study co-author Alexandra Morton, director of the Salmon Coast Field Station, located in the Broughton said, "Salmon farming breaks a natural law. In the natural system, the youngest salmon are not exposed to sea lice because the adult salmon that carry the parasite are offshore. But fish farms cause a deadly collision between the vulnerable young salmon and sea lice. They are not equipped to survive this, and they don't."

The cause, according to Krkošek is simple: "In the Broughton there are just too many farmed fish in the water. If there were only one salmon farm this problem probably wouldn't exist."

What to do? Mark Lewis, a mathematical ecologist at the University of Alberta, identified two possible solutions: closed containment and moving farms away from rivers.

Daniel Pauly, Director of the University of British Columbia's Fisheries Centre, put it in perspective: "If industry says it's too expensive to move the fish farms or contain them, they are actually saying the natural system must continue to pay the price. They are, as economists would say, externalizing the costs of fish farming on the wild salmon and the public."

Corporate-Government Collusion in Collapse of Pink Salmon

The BC Liberal [*sic*] Party has been supporting an increase in the number of salmon farm operations.⁵ The salmon farming industry has reaped a whirlwind of criticism. Corporate salmon farming in BC is Norwegian dominated, and a section of the Norwegian media jumped to a nationalistic defense of the Norwegian concerns.

Overall, the Norwegian media reaction was mixed. Norway's largest media house, NRK, headlined with "Norwegian company wipes out wild salmon."⁶ Industry media portrayed the matter differently. *Næringslivsavisen* ran: "Attack on Norwegian salmon giants."⁷ *Dagens Næringsliv's* headline was: "Frontal attack against Norwegian salmon giants."⁸ They attacked the prestigious *Science* journal and denounced the scientists as "activists." Morton was labeled an "environmentalist," as was Krkošek. One wonders about what is so objectionable about being an "environmentalist." Nonetheless, one would hardly hurl the "environmentalist" label at the corporatists.

Marine Harvest Canada CEO Vincent Erenst complained the *Science* article authors are not "independent researchers."⁹ Erenst charged that the scientists are engaged in "agenda research," which is "not research." He further asserted, "These researchers have made up their minds they would arrive at a predetermined result, then have ruled out everything that conflicts with their hypothesis." Nowhere in the interview is evidence provided to back up his allegations.

Ian Roberts, Marine Harvest Canada's communications director, chimed in, "I believe people are starting to get a little weary of this type of Doomsday prophecy."⁹ These are sly digs bordering on *ad hominem* that do not address the scientists' research results and conclusions.

The [Pacific Salmon Forum](#) responded, "The extent of the impact of salmon farming on wild salmon is still not fully understood, nor is there a consensus of scientists on the best ways to minimize that impact." This is an unsurprisingly wishy-washy statement coming from a panel of seven individuals appointed by the BC government, whose ruling Liberal Party is a major recipient of political contributions from the salmon-farming industry.¹⁰ Presumably, the Pacific Salmon Forum holds that a looming 99 percent eradication of existing wild salmon stocks is worth the risk?

Mary Ellen Walling, executive director of the British Columbia Salmon Farmers Association ([BCSFA](#))

stated that Krkošek and Morton are “well known for their hard line views about salmon farming.”⁹ One wonders if this is similar to the hard-line rejection of environmental concerns by the salmon-farming industry lobby.

The BCSFA once claimed it would “like to work in partnership to ensure wild salmon are protected.”¹¹

Krkošek criticizes the salmon farming industry for lacking the competence to realize the problem. “We have tried to co-operate for years, but it has been difficult. The salmon farming industry does not want to talk with environmentalists at all, and they are skeptical of the science around this,” he said.¹²

Nevertheless, when criticisms were directed to the study, Krkosek compellingly refuted the criticisms.¹³

Given what is at stake, Morton called for public input: “Wild salmon are enormously important to the ecosystem, economies, and culture. Now it is clear they are disappearing in place of an industry. People need to know this and make a decision what they want: industry-produced salmon or wild salmon.”

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1. Alexandra Morton, “Dying of Salmon Farming” in Stephen Hume, Alexandra Morton, Betty C. Keller, Rosella M. Leslie, Otto Langer, and Don Staniford, *A Stain Upon the Sea: West Coast Salmon Farming* (Harbour Publishing, 2004), 199-237. See [review](#). #
 2. Martin Krkošek, Jennifer S. Ford, Alexandra Morton, Subhash Lele, Ransom A. Myers, Mark A. Lewis, “Declining Wild Salmon Populations in Relation to Parasites from Farm Salmon,” *Science*, 14 December 2007: Vol. 318. no. 5857, pp. 1772 – 1775. For a summary of the Science paper, see Martin Krkošek, Jennifer S. Ford, Alexandra Morton, Subhash Lele, Ransom A. Myers, Mark A. Lewis “[Aquaculture Impacts on Wild Salmon](#),” *Lensfest Ocean Program Research Series*, December 2007. #
 3. Martin Krkošek, Jennifer S. Ford, Alexandra Morton, Subhash Lele, Ransom A. Myers, Mark A. Lewis “[Aquaculture Impacts on Wild Salmon](#),” *Lensfest Ocean Program Research Series*, December 2007. #
 4. Press release, “[Fish Farms Drive Wild Salmon Populations Toward Extinction: Experts raise serious concerns about the expansion of industrial fish farming](#),” University of Alberta Compass, 13 December 2007. #
 5. Joel Connelly, “[In The Northwest: Opponents are raising a stink over B.C. fish farms](#),” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 21 February 2003. #
 6. Eva Aalberg Undheim, “[Norske selskap utryddar villaks](#),” *nrk nyheter*, 14 December 2007. #
 7. “[Angriper norske laksegiganter: Anklages for å utrydde villaksen i Canada](#),” *NA24.no*, 14 December 2007. #
 8. Bjørn Erik Dahl and Agnar Berg, “[Frontalangrep mot norske laksegiganter](#),” *DN.no*, 14 December 2007.

From an industry that hires disinformation specialists, the industry offensive was predictable. Kim Petersen, “[Farmageddon and the Spin-doctors](#),” *Dissident Voice*, 29 March 2003. For a recap of industry complaints, see Kim Petersen, “[Eating Profit: Frustrations of the Salmon-Farming Industry](#),” *Dissident Voice*, 21 April 2005. #

9. Bjørn Erik Dahl and Agnar Berg, “Marine Harvest Canada boss attacks Science article writers,” *Intrafish*, 18 December 2007. # # #
10. Tom Barrett, “[Fish Farm Documents Show Politics Trump Science, Say Critics](#),” *The Tyee*, 12 May 2005. #

11. Mary Ellen Walling, "[Wild versus farmed Salmon: Emotion Versus Facts](#)," British Columbia Salmon Farmers Association, 15 April 2004. NB, the link no longer appears to carry the entirety of the article. #
12. Translated from Eva Aalberg Undheim, "[Norske selskap utryddar villaks](#)," *nrk nyheter*, 14 December 2007. "Vi har forsøkt å få til eit samarbeid i årevis, men det har vore vanskeleg. Oppdrettsnæringa vil ikkje snakke med miljøvernarar i det heile teke, og dei er skeptiske til vitskapen kring dette, seier han." #
13. Martin Krkosek, "[Public Critiques and Responses](#)." #

Kim Petersen is co-editor of Dissident Voice. He can be reached at: kim@dissidentvoice.org. [Read other articles by Kim](#).

This article was posted on Saturday, December 22nd, 2007 at 5:02 am and is filed under [Capitalism](#), [Corporate Globalization](#), [Environment](#), [Oceans/Seas](#). **[Send to a friend](#)**.

5 comments on this article so far ...

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 **gerald spezio** said on December 22nd, 2007 at 6:34 am #

As the wild salmon go, so goes the human experiment.

 **Andrew Williams** said on December 22nd, 2007 at 10:42 am #

RE: Wild Salmon article

Great article, Kim. I've been involved for three years in the fight to keep fish farms out of the coastal waters of northern British Columbia, and I've experienced all the frustrations of dealing with an industry in denial and with its government lackeys. Like Morton and Krkosek, I've been on the receiving end of inane ad hominem attacks from Roberts and Walling, and I've come to realize that the Pacific Salmon Forum is being used by the Liberal government as part of their delaying tactics. As long as Fraser continues to claim that the science is not clear, the Liberals will use his statements to justify their inaction. The Special Committee on Sustainable Aquaculture established by the Liberal government issued its report in May, 2007, calling for closed containment for existing farms and no fish farms in the North, after eighteen months of public hearings. We're still waiting for the Liberals' response.

Andrew Williams

 **gerald spezio** said on December 22nd, 2007 at 11:23 am #

I am ashamed to admit it, but many years ago when farmed salmon was very new and “in;” I thought that it was a terrific concept and supported the entire scheme wholeheartedly.

At the same time I was blindly spewing tons of carbon with a vengeance while playing Jack Kerouac and having a grand time.

 **jaimé** said on December 22nd, 2007 at 2:48 pm #

Re: GS's disappearing posts

Blame the Zionists.

 **Neil Frazer, PhD** said on December 23rd, 2007 at 1:37 pm #

The US got into the mess in Iraq because experts like George Tenant told the politicians what they wanted to hear, and guys like Colin Powell rolled over and did what they were told. BC got into this mess (sea lice and salmon farms) in a similar way: “Scientists” who work for Canada’s Department of Fisheries and Oceans told the politicians what the latter wanted to hear. Now the “scientists” and the politicians are too embarrassed to admit that they were wrong, so they continue to mislead the public.

On Rafe Mair’s radio show, in 2004, I stated clearly who should be fired and retired and I stand by those words .
<http://www.canadiansablefish.com/news35.htm>

Neil Frazer, PhD

Add to the discussion

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