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## Laine Welch: Report casts doubt on B.C. cod farming

### SPOTLIGHT: RESOURCES

LAINE WELCH  
FISHERIES

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KODIAK -- Alaska longliners provide most of the world's black cod, and they are rightfully fearful over the prospect of large-scale farming in British Columbia. Thirty-seven farm sites have been approved around Vancouver Island, with a hatchery that would produce juvenile fish for the growers.

But a new report from economists at the University of British Columbia could prompt policy-makers to put the brakes on the intended industry. Titled "Ecological and Economic Impact Assessment of Sablefish Aquaculture in British Columbia," it concludes that industrialized farming is unlikely to deliver economic benefits to the province.

"I was really surprised at the results, amazed actually," said Rashid Sumaila, director of UBC's Fisheries Economics Research Unit, who has been examining the issue over the past year. Sumaila said that, going into the study, he believed economic gains would outweigh environmental risks. "As an economist, I was a bit skeptical about the many ecological arguments we hear, and I thought the economics would look good," he added.

A key finding is that any increase in black cod supply will come at the expense of both farmers and fishermen but will benefit consumers -- in Japan. Nearly all of the production goes there, "while we sit here with lower prices to the producers and possible ecological risks," Sumaila said.

The report mirrors the findings of a 2-year-old University of Washington study. That report said the world black cod catch each year averages about 65 million pounds, of which more than half comes from Alaska. Adding 1 million pounds more would drive down fishermen's prices by 62 percent. Black cod is one of the most lucrative species, often averaging close to \$3.50 a pound at the docks. The UW report also said a major expansion in farming would undercut the value of black cod fishing rights that British Columbia and Alaska longliners hold worth close to \$500 million.

Sumaila said he hopes the results of the economic studies will slow Canada's push toward black cod farming. "If the policy-makers are really looking for good scientific information and analysis to support what is really best for the province, one would hope this report will make them think again," he said.

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