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DFO and Fish Farms

By [Rob Brown - Terrace Standard](#)
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For over 20 years, I've written about the problems with fish farms. Recently I was forwarded a letter written by Dr. Neil Frazer, Professor of Geophysics at the University of Hawaii. Dr. Frazer recently travelled to Norway, along with a delegation of British Columbians concerned with the deleterious effect of fish farms on wild salmon, to appeal to Cermaq, the Norwegian firm that owns many farms operating on the BC coast.

I've maintained that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), though it is tasked with the stewardship of Canada's fisheries resources, is a bureaucracy run amok that has ruined and continues to ruin our wild fisheries. Dr. Frazer's letter contains an astute, and alarming analysis of how the DFO is putting our wild salmon at risk by aiding and abetting fish farm aquaculture on this coast. If you care about the marine environment about fish or make your living by fishing, you should read this.

Peer-reviewed studies show that farm-fostered sea lice reduce the productivity of wild salmon populations. Each autumn, larvae from lice on in-migrating wild adult salmon infect farm salmon. Six months later, larvae from lice of the farm salmon infect out-migrating juvenile wild salmon. Pink salmon fry are especially vulnerable because they enter the ocean weighing about a quarter of a gram and they do not have scales. In areas without salmon farms, infection rates of pink salmon fry are negligible compared to rates in areas with farms. Sea lice are classified as parasites because they increase the mortality rates of their hosts in well understood ways. Despite the simplicity of the mechanism, and the many peer-review studies that support it, there is confusion in Canada because of a small group of scientists in Canada's DFO. Those scientists have an explicit duty to support government policy, and the current Minister of Fisheries and Oceans favours salmon farming. This is not a recipe for good science. Judging from their papers, this group lacks basic training in the population dynamics of host-parasite systems and their intention is to mislead their readers. In plain English, their papers appear to have been written mainly for propaganda purposes. In Norway, by contrast, government scientists now accept that sea lice from salmon farms are responsible for declines of wild salmon and sea trout.

Dr. Larry Dill, a world renowned Canadian ecologist, has described DFO's Minister and senior bureaucrats thus: "They are either extremely ignorant, misinformed, or they are lying to us." Dr. Daniel Pauly, easily the work's most eminent fisheries scientist, agrees with Dr. Dill. As Dr. Dill noted in his testimony to Parliament of Canada's Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, the science supporting declines of wild salmon due to salmon farms is about as certain as science can ever be, and it is wrong for decision makers to delay or deny by seizing on the fact that nothing in science is ever 100 percent certain. Scientists who have studied the situation, and are not compromised by being on the payroll of the salmon farming industry or a captive government agency, agree that farms must be removed from the migration routes of juvenile Pacific salmon in BC if those salmon are to be preserved.

I share the feelings and concerns of Dr. Dill and Dr. Pauly. Moreover, the same lies that were used to deceive the people of BC are now being used to deceive countries that haven't given their coasts over to sea cages. The propaganda generated by that small group of scientists at DFO has not only created confusion in Canada; it has created confusion around the world.

One of the ways in which the bureaucrats at DFO have controlled this issue is by tasking unqualified people to deal with it. The sea lice group at DFO would not be bad scientists if they stuck to what they know, but they haven't had the courage to admit that they don't have the necessary mathematical training. To fish pathologists and old-school fisheries scientists, the sea lice issue is a mystery, but to anyone with training in mathematical ecology, it is easy. Remember there are only two important questions: 1. Does adding farm fish to the ocean cause sea lice levels to rise? 2. Do increased levels of sea lice cause wild fish to decline? Both questions can be answered with a yes, using basic ecology or basic physics, without ever putting a farm fish in the water. Anything other than a decline in wild fish would be a miracle. Unfortunately basic ecology doesn't tell us how much the wild fish will decline. For that, one can do a type of mathematical calculation that fewer than a hundred biologists in the world would understand – or one can perform experiments by actually farming fish in sea-cages.

Next week: DFO's distraction science in detail.

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