

COUNCIL OF CANADIANS SUPPORTS GETTING FISH FARMS OUT OF COASTAL WATERS ONTO LAND

The Council of Canadians ‘Fish Farms Out Of Coastal Waters’ campaign is committed to protecting wild fish and the ecosystems that support them. To this end, it is our firm belief that the open net-pen fish farm industry must move its operations out of the ocean and onto land, with immediate funding from federal and provincial governments for direct and indirect industry workers to help them transition to sustainable employment.

Wild salmon are at the heart of many First Nation communities, and a primary food source. Their protection is vital for sustaining people, cultures, and all related ecosystems and species. And yet, wherever in the world open-net fish farms operate, they spread parasites, viruses, bacteria, disease, and pollution – endangering and destroying wild fish and the marine ecosystem.

In B.C, the harm caused by open-net fish farms to wild salmon is undeniable, and many salmon runs are dangerously low and at risk of extinction. The open-net fish farm industry must take its operations out of the path of all wild salmon migrations –out of the oceans and onto land-based containment, shutting down the marine-based industry and immediately funding workers to transition to sustainable jobs.

For these reasons, we believe that the recent decision by Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) Minister Bernadette Jordan to close open-net fish farms in the Discovery Islands must stand. As biologist Alexandra Morton recently said, “Already this year, [fish farm company] Mowi has exceeded sea lice thresholds set to protect wild salmon in the Discovery Islands. They simply can’t control their lice and we cannot lose another generation of wild salmon to this industry. If they are allowed to restock farms in this region, we will lose the Fraser River sockeye. It is that simple.”

On paper, the Fisheries Act, the Species at Risk Act, and the Canadian Environmental Protection Act all include safeguards to protect fish, fish habitat, endangered species, and the marine environment. But in practice, the fish farm industry has too often violated the protective laws of these Acts without any penalty by the DFO. Meanwhile, the DFO continues to advocate for an expansion of the aquaculture industry. Shannon Arnold (Ecology Action Centre, Halifax, NS) and Karen Wristen (SeaChoice, Sointula BC) feel this is “making a mockery of Canada’s commitment to protect biological diversity and pursue sustainability.”

Proposed new laws are also seriously flawed. The new federal Aquaculture Act will exclude aquaculture activities from the application of the Fisheries Act.

There is some merit in the recently announced Pacific Salmon Strategy Initiative which includes the formation of a Pacific Salmon Secretariat. However, that initiative is in effect asking the fox to watch the chicken coop because it continues to rely on the dysfunctional, top-down model of the DFO overseeing data collection and operations.

First Nations leader Bob Chamberlin advocates “working at a government to government level” by inviting First Nations to fill DFO director-level positions affecting wild salmon and by creating a Director of Wild Salmon (Pacific Region) in partnership with First Nations. This proposal has been whole heartedly endorsed by many First Nations and environmentalists including Alexandra Morton.

If wild Pacific salmon are to survive, we need action now.

The Council of Canadians ‘Fish Farms Out Of Coastal Waters’ campaign calls on all affected people – First Nations, municipal and regional councils, businesses and local entrepreneurs, non-profits, and citizen groups – to work together to:

- Protect the migratory routes of wild Pacific salmon by removing all open-net fish farms from the ocean and replacing them with closed-containment fish farms on land
- Support federal and provincial government legislation and policies to provide immediate funding for all impacted open-net fish farm workers and others involved with the industry to help them transition to sustainable jobs
- Create a path towards a just recovery for the wild salmon economy
- Protect ocean ecologies from sewage and pollutants, and remove ocean debris
- Support sustainable green ocean initiatives and planning in recreation, transportation and jobs
- Ask for the world-class marine accident recovery service promised by provincial and federal governments
- Require the new Aquaculture Act to include aquaculture activities in the application of the Fisheries Act
- Invite First Nations to fill DFO director level positions that affect wild salmon and advocate for the creation of a new Director of Wild Salmon (Pacific Region) position in partnership with First Nations
- Support a Green New Deal

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