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Ministry of Agriculture and Lands

AQUACULTURE REPORTS SHOW HIGH LEVEL OF COMPLIANCE

VICTORIA – The Province released its 2006 Compliance and Enforcement and Fish Health Reports today. Both indicate that B.C.'s aquaculture industry is committed to upholding a high level of environmental standards and is serious about co-existing with wild salmon stocks, announced Agriculture and Lands Minister Pat Bell.

“The annual reports are part of the government's commitment to closely monitor aquaculture operations in an open, transparent manner and to ensure a safe and sustainable industry,” said Bell. “The aquaculture industry has created tremendous opportunities for B.C.'s coastal communities and those economic opportunities need to continue to be in balance with the protection of wild salmon stocks.”

The data for the reports was collected during 2006, and then underwent a complex process of being compiled and compared to final industry submissions and audit lab results.

The Annual Inspection Report shows a high level of compliance overall by the operational sites inspected in 2006. On average, marine salmon farms obtained a 99.7 per cent compliance rating for both Ministry of Agriculture and Lands and Ministry of Environment requirements. In addition to ministry inspector visits, other provincial and federal authorities also regularly visit marine finfish sites. On average, each operational finfish facility is visited at least three to four times a year by various government representatives.

The report also indicates that in 2006 there were 11 occurrences of fish escapes, resulting in a loss of 19,085 of marine farmed salmon - 17 Atlantic and 19,068 Chinook. One investigation resulted in a violation ticket and the other is still under investigation. Historic escape statistics show fish losses in 2005 at 64, in 2004 at 43,985, and in 2003 at 40. This is in comparison to a nine-year high of 82,875 in 1998. The ministry places a high priority on its escape prevention program and operators are required through legislation to report any known or suspected incidents within 24 hours of discovery.

“B.C. has adopted a performance-based approach to aquaculture management, which involves setting standards, monitoring, auditing and adaptive management. We set standards and industry has to meet them,” said Bell. “We are working collaboratively with all stakeholders to develop a consensus-based aquaculture strategy that represents the interests of local communities, First Nations, industry and the environment.”

The Fish Health Report identified no disease findings that had not already been reported in wild, hatchery-reared or research salmonids in B.C. The survival rate of farmed Atlantic salmon ranges from 94 to 98 per cent. Random audit results derived from dead Atlantic salmon showed 78 per cent of the samples were free from infectious disease and the remaining had mainly myxobacteriosis and bacterial kidney disease. These diseases are natural and common to the Pacific coast in both wild and farmed stocks and none are infectious to people. As part of the ministry's routine surveillance program, testing is done on all samples for exotic fish diseases of concern and nothing has been found to date.

With regard to Pacific salmon, the survival ranges from 88 to 94 per cent, and 57 per cent of the dead fish were free from infectious disease. The remaining dead died mainly from bacterial kidney disease and Rickettsiosis.

Sea lice audits conducted in 2006 during the out-migration period of wild fry (April to July) were well below the accepted level in all but two subzones in which affected companies increased monitoring frequency, harvested fish and enacted health management strategies.

In 2002, there were no data on sea lice or the potential impact on wild stocks in B.C. As a result, the Province initiated an on-farm lice monitoring pilot project that was extended in 2003 to include the entire B.C. industry. Government has since implemented the monitoring program as a part of the Fish Health Management Plans and has also instituted the audit and verification program.

These two independent annual reports are part of the B.C. government's commitment to closely monitor aquaculture operations to ensure a safe and sustainable industry that co-exists with wild stocks. The full reports are available at:

http://www.al.gov.bc.ca/fisheries/aqua_report/2006/fish_health2006.pdf

http://www.al.gov.bc.ca/fisheries/aqua_report/2006/aquaculture_inspect2006.pdf

2 backgrounder(s) attached.

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