



Wild Salmon Defenders Alliance
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The Honourable Bernadette Jordan
Minister of Fisheries and Oceans Canada
Parliament Buildings, Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0A6

Dear Honourable Minister,

January 2, 2020

Happy New Year! We wish you much success in your role as the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans Canada. We are encouraged that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau officially mandated you to “work with the province of British Columbia and Indigenous communities to create a responsible plan to transition from open net-pen salmon farming in coastal British Columbia waters by 2025.” This directive needs to be in line with the peer-reviewed science which identifies the Piscine Reovirus as a disease agent, a contagious blood virus from the Atlantic Ocean that is harming Pacific salmon.

This is an international issue. The State of Washington has passed legislation to phase out fish farms from their coastal waters by 2022. State officials test farmed Atlantic salmon in Cooke Aquaculture hatcheries for the Piscine Reovirus. Consequently, some 1,600,000 infected farmed Atlantic salmon have been prevented from being put into their coastal waters. In this country, two courts have ruled that DFO’s policy of not testing for PRV in hatcheries is unlawful and that DFO must revise this policy to align with the precautionary principle. Science publications have long accepted that PRV is a disease agent and a contagious blood virus from the Atlantic Ocean that is harming wild Pacific salmon. In the high-density fish farm environment, PRV is known to mutate to higher virulence. Maintaining fish farms on our coast will seriously compromise the State of Washington’s efforts to restore wild salmon populations.

In light of the court orders to test for PRV, we were shocked and dismayed when Rebecca Reid, Director General, Pacific Region, recently sent a letter to Dr. Alexandra Morton informing her that DFO will not only issue permits to transfer Atlantic salmon into marine pens without screening them for PRV, but will also sign permits for fish they know to be infected. The Broughton Archipelago First Nations have won the right to prohibit infected fish from being placed in their territorial waters. However, viruses know no borders and PRV-positive farm salmon will be going into their territories if DFO’s reckless policy continues. This policy is in bad faith as it violates Indigenous rights and title as enshrined in the Constitution of Canada, contravenes federal fishery regulations, and brushes aside the precautionary principle. The Wild Salmon Defenders Alliance is joining the call for an investigation into how this dangerous decision by DFO, in a “caretaker government mode,” was made.

The 2012 Cohen Commission report warned that the use of open net pen fish farms may cause serious or irreversible harm to wild salmon. With the current collapse of wild salmon runs, it is clearly imperative that the precautionary principle be applied in favour of wild salmon instead of the predominantly foreign-owned fish farm industry. There is accumulative scientific evidence showing fish farms are doing great harm to wild salmon and their habitat. All of this highlights the fact that DFO is in a conflict of interest by having incompatible mandates to promote both a wild salmon industry

and an aquaculture industry that is seriously endangering the former. Failure to ensure that the last few years of marine salmon farming do not do further serious damage to wild salmon, will only breed cynicism and mistrust in Canada's democracy and invites the unthinkable – extinction of already endangered wild salmon runs.

The vast majority of First Nations and British Columbians in general are in favour of moving fish farms from the ocean to land in containment as has been successfully done in other jurisdictions, and is currently being done by "Kuterra" on Vancouver Island. This alternative is strongly supported by Namgis, Mamalilikulla and Kwikwasut'inuxw Haxwa'mis First Nations, the Pacific Salmon Foundation, the Union of BC Municipalities, various eco-tourism businesses, the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC), the Lower Fraser Fisheries Alliance, academics, scientists, Indigenous Nations along the Fraser and Thomson rivers, the Watershed Watch Salmon Society, Living Oceans, the David Suzuki Foundation, other environmental agencies, and so many others.

We urge collaboration with the other federal parties, Indigenous Nations along the rivers and coastal waters, as well as the Province of British Columbia to ensure immediate testing for PRV, a full and transparent explanation on DFO's policy on PRV and initiation of legislation to phase out fish farms from the Pacific coast. We are asking for the timeline you are establishing for these important measures.

Eddie Gardner
President

CC John Horgan, BC Premier
Chief Farron Soukochoff, Dzawada'enuxw First Nation
Chief Bob Chamberlin, Kwikwasut'inuxw Haxwa'mis First Nation
Chief Don Svanvik, Namgis First Nation
Jack Woodward, Q.C. Lawyer and Author, Wild Salmon Defence Fund
Brian Riddell, President and CEO, Pacific Salmon Foundation
Murray Ned, Executive Director of Lower Fraser Fisheries Alliance
Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President, Union of BC Indian Chiefs
Dr. Alexandra Morton, Marine Biologist
Aaron Hill, President, Watershed Watch Salmon Society
Brenden Glauser, Communications Manager, David Suzuki Foundation
Tony Allard, Chairman, Wild Salmon Forever
Sooke Mayor Maja Tait, President, Union of BC Municipalities
Karen Wristen, Living Oceans
Kurt Beardslee, Wild Fish Conservancy