

February 11, 2002

Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries

Infectious Hematopoietic Necrosis Virus (IHNV) — UPDATE

IHNV is a virus that affects both wild and farmed salmon. Sockeye, chinook, coho, rainbow trout and Atlantic salmon can all contract the virus, but Atlantic salmon are particularly susceptible. IHNV occurs naturally in wild salmon populations in B.C. This has been the source of infection for farmed stock.

IHN is a virus and not a bacterial infection; infected fish are not treated with antibiotics. IHNV cannot be passed on to humans, so there is no threat to human health.

Because wild fish are more resistant to IHNV and have lived with background levels of the virus for centuries, the risk of the disease on a farm causing problems for wild fish is very low.

Fish farms in British Columbia are tested regularly for diseases such as IHNV, as part of a new provincial fish surveillance program. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) monitors outbreaks of IHNV in wild stocks in British Columbia.

Last week, the virus was reported on a salmon farm in the Broughton Archipelago. The company decided to harvest all 1.5 million Atlantic salmon smolt on site as a precautionary measure to avoid risk of the disease affecting other nearby Atlantic salmon farm sites.

The company with MAFF and DFO fish health staff developed an appropriate procedure for handling, disposal and treatment of the carcasses and wastewater from this affected site. The fish have been taken by seiners (closed systems with no water recirculation) to a Vancouver rendering plant where it will be treated and made into fish meal.

The fish will be removed from the transportation water. That water will be contained in a series of tanks and disinfected with chlorine according to international standards set by the Office International Des Epizooties the world organisation for animal health (<http://www.oie.int/>). The water will be held and de-chlorinated with sodium thiosulfate prior to release. This treatment, which is recommended by DFO, neutralizes any chlorine in the water.

The carcasses are then shipped to the waste reduction plant where the rendering process will result in sufficient temperature (60 degrees for 15 minutes) to kill the virus.

Once all the equipment at the fish farm site is cleaned and disinfected, the site will be left empty for at least three months before it is used again.

Fish farms to the north and south of the infected farm are being tested for the disease and will continue to be tested regularly as part of the province's fish surveillance program.

On Friday, Feb. 8, an injunction was granted to prevent Heritage Aquaculture from offloading fish at Bella Coola Fisheries Processing Facility on the lower Fraser River. The concern was that the disease was not IHNV but another disease, Infectious Salmon Anemia (ISA).

The B.C. Animal Health Laboratory has confirmed that it is indeed IHNV. The procedures developed for handling, disposal and treatment of the carcasses and wastewater will ensure disinfection of the wastewater and destruction of the virus.

To date, offloading of the fish has not occurred, the fishing vessels are being detained at the Fraser River facility. The company is working with its lawyers to have the injunction lifted.

IHNV has been found in farmed salmon since the early 1990s. Because it is carried by a number of wild salmon in B.C., government and industry expect IHNV will continue to affect farmed salmon.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries is working with the affected company to ensure all efforts are taken to resolve this issue. Ministry staff will work with Fisheries and Oceans Canada to ensure a co-ordinated approach to management and resolution of this situation.

For more information on this and other fish health topics, the most recent news and other detailed information on salmon aquaculture, check out our Web site at www.gov.bc.ca/agf.