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Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection

### **SALMON FARMING MONITORING REPORT RELEASED**

VICTORIA – A preliminary review of seabed monitoring data in B.C.'s salmon aquaculture industry that will assist in the ongoing development of new performance-based regulations for fish farms was released today by the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection.

"Strong environmental protection is one of our government's key priorities," Minister of Water, Land and Air Protection Joyce Murray said. "We will continue to work with the salmon farmers to ensure the industry is environmentally sustainable."

The monitoring report was begun by the previous government in March 2000 to provide the detailed scientific data needed to move to performance-based waste management regulations. It is not intended to be a compliance report; rather, it provides an inventory of waste management measures from 94 salmon farms, including 29 monitored by underwater video camera. "These measures will help my ministry develop a strong, new regulatory framework," Murray added.

Murray said any expansion of the industry will use sound science to balance environmental protection with opportunities for economic development. Development will be done in co-operation with the salmon farming industry, the federal government, First Nations, commercial and sport fishers, environmental groups and local governments. Other issues to be examined include fish health, waste management, escape management and the use of existing technology.

"The aquaculture industry has the potential to create more jobs and give hope to coastal communities that need economic opportunities," said Minister of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries John van Dongen. "We hope to achieve growth of this industry in a way that ensures strong environmental protection while also meeting the needs of people who seek prospects for the future."

The Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management will ensure appropriate processes are in place when new sites are needed. Over the next six months, working in co-operation with the federal government, local governments and First Nations, the provincial government will move forward with relocations, as well as identifying sites for an orderly and environmentally sustainable future expansion of the industry.

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Editors: The full report is available online at [http://www.elp.gov.bc.ca/vir/region\\_reports.htm](http://www.elp.gov.bc.ca/vir/region_reports.htm).

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## **BACKGROUNDER**

In October of 1999, the provincial government announced a new policy framework for the management of the salmon aquaculture industry. This framework was designed to address a number of issues identified in the 1997 Environmental Assessment Office comprehensive study of the salmon aquaculture industry.

The new policy framework focused on five key issues:

- Development of performance-based waste management standards;
- Reduction of escapes from salmon farms;
- Pilot projects to test new closed containment and other green technology;
- Development of fish health monitoring and reporting system; and
- Relocation of poorly sited farms without expanding the number of sites.

With regard to waste management standards, the government agreed to move from the existing input based regulations to establishing performance-based standards. Based on these new standards, the industry would be allowed to manage their aquaculture operations to maximize the production while ensuring the assimilative capacity of the surrounding area is not unduly affected.

The concept was to develop a set of chemical and physical indicators that could be used to determine the health of the benthic community (bottom-dwelling organisms). These indicators would then be used as standards to ensure that there are no significant long-term changes to the benthic communities within the vicinity of the salmon aquaculture operation compared to background levels in the general area. The government did not have sufficient information for determining the relationship between benthic community health and the chemical and physical indicators. Therefore, in the spring of 2000 the industry was required to undertake an extensive monitoring program designed to collect a set of chemical and physical data from all existing salmon farming locations. Samples were also collected at control station(s) in the area to determine the background data levels that might exist in the areas. Data collection and monitoring was also conducted by staff of the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection.

In addition, in the summer of 2000, the industry undertook a comprehensive study of the benthic communities in a number of representative areas. The data from the detailed benthic studies would be examined in order to establish a relationship between the chemical and physical indicators and the health of the benthic community.

A technical advisory group was established with representatives of both the provincial and federal government and the salmon aquaculture industry to assist in the development of the year 2000 monitoring program. The advisory group is now assisting in review of the year 2000 monitoring data and will help guide the development of the performance based standards.

A draft report on the detailed focus studies was provided by the consultants in July 2001 and is currently being reviewed by the technical staff in both government agencies and industry. The technical team is scheduled to meet in September 2001 to review the results of the sampling program and the benthic analysis. The working group will focus on what the next steps are required in order to develop the new performance based standards.

The results of the first round of chemical and physical sampling data collected by industry and government were collated by staff from the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection in May 2001 and are summarized in the report entitled 'A Preliminary Review of Chemical and Physical Data for Y2000 Interim Monitoring Program'. Statistical analysis of the data has not been completed nor has the farm site data been fully evaluated against the control point sampling data. The results of the Preliminary Analysis will, however, be used to establish monitoring priorities for Y2001, to pinpoint areas where operational practices can be improved and in confirming sites where relocation is desirable.

It is important to recognize that information collected in this initial sampling program and the chemical thresholds used in the Preliminary Analysis may not necessarily reflect the final requirements of the new performance-based standards. Until the physical and chemical data are evaluated with the benthic sampling program, it is not possible to draw any conclusions regarding the impact of any individual farm operation. This is simply the first step in a program designed to guide the development of standards. The information will also be used in the development of simulation models that will guide the industry in new siting decisions.

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