
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Agriculture and Lands

STRONG FISH HEALTH STRATEGY WORKING, AUDIT SHOWS

VICTORIA – The most comprehensive farmed fish health report ever done in North America shows British Columbia’s results-based regulatory regime is working, Agriculture and Lands Minister Pat Bell said today.

British Columbia’s approach to fish health management is a precautionary one based on the best science and the public’s expectation that B.C.’s aquaculture industry be managed in a sustainable fashion with wild stocks and the environment protected. Deemed the best in the world, it is being considered by other countries in the development of their own fish health management programs.

“British Columbians should be proud of the fact we are acknowledged as the world-leader in fish health management and continue to work at building a sustainable aquaculture industry that co-exists with wild stocks,” Bell said today in releasing the report. “The findings from the fish health program confirm that B.C. has one of the strongest sets of regulations and the highest standards relating to the health of farmed fish of any jurisdiction in the world. Industry knows what government requires for the protection of our environment and our wild fish stocks. The public can be confident those standards are being met.”

Conducted between 2003 and 2005, the fish health report reviews the results from:

- 339 random on-site inspections
- health tests on over 1,900 fish that died from various causes
- 96 farm visits and nearly 5,500 fish tested as part of the sea lice audit

The report also includes a government audit of industry records on disease incidence and sea lice numbers. The audit:

- Confirmed industry reports that less than two per cent of mortalities are caused by infectious disease
- Found the diseases are ones previously reported in wild stocks
- Found no evidence of fish farms introducing new or exotic diseases to the environment
- Confirmed that stringent sea lice control measures were implemented and that trigger levels for action of three lice per fish have not been exceeded on an audit basis during wild fish out-migration.

Following an environmental assessment review in 2001, the Province developed a wide-ranging policy designed to improve monitoring and treatment of fish disease and sea lice in the aquaculture industry. The government in 2003 required that fish farms implement comprehensive Fish Health Management Plans (FHMP) by 2004. The audit confirms that every active salmon fish farm has met that requirement.

A condition of obtaining a licence to operate, FHMPs require industry to:

- Monitor, record and report mortalities
- Monitor and record disease occurrence
- Provide public quarterly reports on mortalities and fish disease
- Monitor, record and report sea lice numbers and treatment
- Provide public monthly reports on sea lice (posted to the ministry's website)
- Adhere to established trigger levels for sea lice management

To check the information fish farms provide in their FHMPs, ministry fish health experts audit company records, conduct random on-site inspections and test fish for disease and sea lice. The FHMP template is reviewed annually by the ministry fish health veterinarian to ensure its requirements are based on the latest science.

“To further ensure B.C.’s fish health program is based on the most current science and accepted practices, government has commissioned two external scientific reviews,” Bell said. “If those reviews have recommendations that will strengthen our fish health program, they will be implemented.”

The Centre for Coastal Health at Malaspina College is evaluating the Fish Health Program and will provide government with any recommendations required for improvement. A second study, being done by Dr. Angus Cameron from AusVet Animal Health Services of Australia, is evaluating the science and techniques used in exotic disease detection and control. Both reviews are due by year's end.

B.C. is the world's fourth-largest farmed salmon producer, with a 2005 farm gate value of nearly \$320 million. It accounts for about 4,000 direct and indirect jobs and annual wages of \$50 million. Women and First Nations fill over 50 per cent of aquaculture jobs.

The fish health report is 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 report is available at: www.mediaroom.gov.bc.ca/DisplayEventDetails.aspx?eventId=339

1 backgrounder(s) attached.

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