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SOLUTIONS ARE IN OUR NATURE

Integrated Multi-trophic Aquaculture (IMTA) and Salmon Farming

Recent media reports and programs have raised the issue of IMTA as a new approach to cleaning up open net cage salmon farming.

IMTA uses different species, like mussels, seaweeds, and other invertebrates, to try and clean up the waste nutrients (mostly fish poop, uneaten food pellets and the dust from food pellets broken during shipping and handling) that go into the environment from open net cage salmon farms.

IMTA is an interesting effort at cleaning up some, but not all of the major negative impacts of salmon farming.

It does not address some of the key issues like sea lice and disease that are causing so much trouble for wild salmon, nor does it stop escapes of farmed fish into the wild.

As such, IMTA farms do not automatically rank as more sustainable than other types of open net salmon farming and do not qualify for preferential treatment by consumers or seafood companies. To date, there has been no formal and publicly transparent assessment of the overall sustainability of these farms and they do not rank higher on lists like Canada's SeaChoice or the Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch. The few efforts to give eco-certification labels to IMTA farms have been industry developed programs that do not have transparent criteria or participation from independent science or conservation stakeholders and are not considered credible from that standpoint.

Currently, the major user of IMTA in Canada only uses this method on less than 1 per cent of their total salmon production, so even this small innovation does not represent product consumers are likely to find in stores.

While we are supportive of efforts to find better ways to farm salmon, our position is still that only separating farmed and wild fish through some form of closed containment system can sufficiently reduce the risk to wild salmon and the environment. IMTA may play a role in creating better closed containment projects that recycle wastes into salable products, but it does not make open net cage farming appropriate, especially where wild salmon are depending on the same environment.

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