

# Scientists dispute findings of provincial report that minimizes risk of aquaculture to wild salmon

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## **A group of scientists has expressed “deep concerns” to the B.C. government about a provincial report that plays down the risks of aquaculture to wild Pacific salmon.**

**Photograph by: bill keay , vancouver sun**

A group of scientists has expressed "deep concerns" to the B.C. government about a provincial report that plays down the risks of aquaculture to wild Pacific salmon.

In a written critique, the scientists says the report by Gary Marty, a fish pathologist at the provincial Animal Health Centre in Abbotsford, "incorrectly represents the current science on the ecology of disease interactions between wild and farmed salmon." It also contains "several errors of interpretation and a selective use of literature that we believe lead to a biased conclusion that farmed salmon pose minimal disease risks to wild salmon in B.C.," they contend.

The eight scientists — academics from B.C., Alberta, and Ontario who specialize in salmon and infectious diseases — are concerned that the report could be used by the province to justify an expansion of salmon farming on the coast.

"A more complete and balanced assessment of the scientific literature reveals abundant evidence that salmon aquaculture does pose a disease risk to wild salmon, although there is ongoing debate about the extent of that risk," the critique states.

Marty's report, dated March 16, 2015, is entitled, Information Regarding Concerns about Farmed Salmon - Wild Salmon Interactions.

He concludes that diseases in B.C. farmed Atlantic salmon "pose no more than a minimal risk of serious harm to the health of migrating wild salmon" and that less than one per cent of Atlantic salmon die of diseases that might be infectious to wild Pacific salmon.

Among the other 99 per cent of farmed salmon, 90 per cent survive and nine per cent die of other causes.

Marty added that the escape of farmed salmon also poses minimal risks, noting there have been 170 deliberate releases of Atlantic salmon over the years in North American waters in attempts to establish reproducing populations, and all failed.

Four of the researchers who signed the critique are with Simon Fraser University: Lawrence Dill, professor emeritus, department of biological sciences; Brendan Connors, senior systems ecologist, ESSA Technologies, and adjunct professor, department of biological sciences; Richard Routledge, professor, department of statistics and actuarial science; and John Reynolds, professor and Tom Buell B.C. Leadership Chair in Aquatic Conservation, department of biological sciences.

In an interview, Dill said there is research ongoing, including by the federal fisheries department and Pacific Salmon Foundation, to establish the disease risk that Atlantic salmon pose to wild Pacific salmon and that it is premature to conclude the risk is minimal. He urged the province not to approve any expansion of salmon farming until those studies have been concluded, perhaps in two or three years.

"To make that argument, Dr. Marty...has used the literature very selectively and improperly and in some cases he has misquoted or miscited information. These are cardinal sins in academia. His entire approach is very biased and presupposes the conclusion before he presents the evidence for it."

There is "considerable evidence, both in B.C. and otherwise, that sea lice, for example, have a major effect on wild fish," said Dill, adding that the cause of death of most fish in fish farms is not determined.

He added that the scientists have written to Premier Christy Clark and three of her cabinet ministers but none have responded.

No one from the province Friday immediately commented on the scientists' critique.

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