

British Columbia Fisheries critic, NDP MLA Robin Austin tables Letter addressed to Federal Minister of Fisheries and Premier Campbell demanding Fisheries Act be applied to salmon “farms”

Letter written by wild salmon biologist Alexandra Morton, signed by 9,758 citizens in less than one month

(March 26, 2009, Victoria, B.C.) Robin Austin MLA for Skeena and Opposition Critic for Fisheries “tabled” a letter today in the Legislature calling on the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans Canada the Honourable Gail Shea and Premier Gordon Campbell to apply the Fisheries Act to the salmon net pen facilities. The letter states:

Wild salmon are the backbone of the BC Coast. On February 9, 2009 BC Supreme Court ruled that salmon farms are a fishery and a federal responsibility. The science is in. The feedlot fishery is damaging wild salmon stocks worldwide (Ford and Myers 2008). Fraser sockeye and all southcoast BC salmon and steelhead are now at risk as a result of the Provincial policy of allowing the feedlot fishery to use Canada's most valuable wild salmon habitat.

We the undersigned demand that Fisheries and Oceans Canada apply the Fisheries Act to this industry and immediately:

- Place observers during feedlot salmon harvest to assess unlawful by-catch;
- Examine feedlot salmon as they are cleaned for presence of wild fish in their digestive tract;
- Licence vessels transporting aquaculture salmon like all other commercial fishing vessels;
- As per Pacific Fishery Regulation "Prohibited Fishing Methods" ban grow lights on fish feedlots to end wild prey species attraction into the pens;
- Remove the marine feedlot industry from wild salmon migration routes.

The landmark BC Supreme Court decision states, “The inclusion of fisheries in s. 91(12) of the Constitution Act, 1867 was a recognition that fisheries, as a national resource, require uniformity of the legislation”.

We insist that the Fisheries Act be applied to the salmon feedlot fishery immediately.

Standing by, Alexandra Morton

Marine Harvest has appealed this decision, reportedly because the court does not recognize their fish as private property. The Campbell government has filed an “appearance” and so will be part of this process. If Marine Harvest is successful, they become “farms” again, enjoying the large tax breaks this brings and the ability to privatize fish and fish habitat.

Austin is no stranger to the issue. In 2007, NDP MLA Austin led the Special Legislative Committee on Sustainable Aquaculture which recommended fish farms move into tanks by 2012.

Ms Morton welcomes more signatures because “we don’t know how many are required to bring reason to this situation. The governments involved should always have applied the Fisheries Act fair and square on the salmon feedlot fishery,” states Morton, “just like every other marine user.” Morton first sent the letter on February 23, 2009. When there was no answer she asked 100 fishermen to join her in signing. “Now I have read thousands of angry emails from people throughout BC and Canada who are taking a stand to protect their communities and the future of this country.” Ninety-eight percent of the signers feel Campbell’s government has not done a good job of managing this industry.

“This is not about just another pretty fish. In the global economic storm, this is about economic and food security, our communities, politics and the law,” says Morton. “The court said they are a fishery, there is no plausible reason they should remain exempt from the Fisheries Act.”

To add your signature to the letter, see the signatures or learn more about this issue go to www.adopt-a-fry.org <<http://www.adopt-a-fry.org>>