

Canada's aquaculture industry netting \$2.1 billion annually

Written by Sunny Dhillon (CP)
Friday, 23 April 2010 21:13

A new DFO report claims Canada's aquaculture industry generates \$2.1 billion each year and contributes thousands of jobs in coastal and rural communities.

Fish farm opponents, on the other hand, allege the industry has decimated commercial fisheries. They say it's done far more harm than good for small communities, and they question the study's intentions.

The report, which DFO says it compiled to provide estimates on the industry's economic impacts, found aquaculture production more than quadrupled between 1990 and 2006 and can now be found in all 10 provinces and the Yukon. Of the \$2.1 billion generated in 2007, more than \$960 million was triggered by B.C. fish farms. About \$415 million was generated in New Brunswick, while Ontario had the third-most at just under \$170 million.

The report says the aquaculture industry created an estimated 14,500 full-time equivalent jobs nationwide, though the actual number of employees might be higher because of the sometimes seasonal nature of the work.

Fish farms have been a hot-button issue in B.C. Earlier this week, federal justice officials took legal action against the world's largest producer of farmed salmon. The Public Prosecution Service of Canada filed a sworn statement against Marine Harvest, charging the salmon farmer with four counts of unlawfully possessing wild fish it caught in B.C. waters.

Last week, a group of B.C. First Nations set out on a court battle against the federal and provincial governments over fish farms. The bands are trying to certify a class-action lawsuit because they say they're worried about the environmental impacts of aquaculture and fear farmed fish will spread disease to the almost 230 different wild salmon stocks native to B.C.'s Broughton Archipelago.

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But the DFO report, titled "Socio-Economic Impact of Aquaculture in Canada," was welcomed by industry proponents.

Ruth Salmon, executive director of the Canadian Aquaculture Industry Alliance, an Ottawa-based organization that represents the interests of aquaculture operators, said the study is an important benchmark for fish farming.

"It proves that aquaculture is a revitalizing social and economic force for rural and coastal Canada," she said in an interview. "It shows that we're providing sustainable long-term employment in areas of the country that would otherwise be economically challenged."

Salmon said a lot of Canadians might not realize just how large the industry is and just how big of an economic reach it has because fish farm operators, particularly in B.C., have been hurt by a very high level of public scrutiny.

"I think that the public has that view because oftentimes we're misinterpreted in the media and not everyone knows the facts," she said. "And that's part of what our association and others are there to do, is try to educate people about the real facts."

She said the science-based industry is very different than it was even 10 or 15 years ago, and is constantly evolving. Salmon farming first began in Canada in the 1950s.

One of the more common complaints from aquaculture opponents is that farmed fish can spread sea lice to wild fish. Salmon said the evidence she's seen suggests that's not the case.

But Chief Bob Chamberlin, a member of the First Nations group trying to have its class-action lawsuit certified, said aquaculture's impact on commercial fisheries is clear. "What I keep hearing from this industry is that they provide this lifeblood of employment and economic activity for those remote and coastal communities," he said. "Well, those very same remote and coastal communities . . . enjoyed working as commercial fishermen." Chamberlin, who's also secretary-treasurer for the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, said there's little doubt of the health impacts farmed salmon can have on wild fish. He also questioned the timing of the report, since

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fish farm stories have been making headlines of late.

The report measures the industry's economic impact and arrives at the \$2.1 billion figure by studying its gross domestic product, as well as employment and labour income.

Direct impacts are measured as those linked to the industry itself, while indirect impacts are those that arise from supplying goods and services to aquaculture. Induced impacts comprise of money that is spent after being earned through direct or indirect activities.

<http://tinyurl.com/2c6vuxf>

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