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News

Norway's King to focus on Games, not interest groups

By **Mark Hume**, The Globe and Mail Posted Tuesday, February 2, 2010 12:39 PM ET



Native leaders, environmental groups, scientists and politicians concerned about the impact of fish farms in British Columbia have written to His Royal Highness King Harald V of Norway asking for a meeting when he visits Vancouver during the Olympics.

But a spokesman for the Royal Norwegian Embassy, in Ottawa, says King Harald V is attending the Games to watch athletes perform - and he won't be taking time out to meet with any special interest groups.

"The Crown Prince and Crown Princess will be at the first part of the Olympics and then the King and Queen, their Majesties, will be there for the second part," Jo Slatbak, Deputy Head of Mission for the Royal Norwegian Embassy said in confirming the royal attendance.

When asked if the king would consider meeting with the groups that want to talk to him about the heavy involvement of Norwegian companies in B.C.'s controversial fish farming industry, Mr. Slatbak said it just wouldn't happen.

"No. When their Majesties are here they will be here as guests of the Norwegian Olympic

committee and they will be watching the athletes and that's going to be the extent of their Majesties and their Royal family's visit in Vancouver," said Mr. Slatbak.

More than 170 people signed the letter to King Harald V, which was sent under the letterhead of the Pure Salmon Campaign, an umbrella organization leading the fight to have salmon farms moved out of waters used by wild salmon in B.C.

"We hope that Your Royal Highness can persuade Norwegian companies to clean up their act, move farms out of the path of migrating wild salmon and introduce closed containment systems to protect wild fish from sea lice, mass escapes and infectious diseases," states the letter.

"As King of Norway we appeal to Your Royal Highness - as the head of state for a country which controls the majority of the global salmon farming sector - to do everything in your power to help save wild fish from the impacts of open net cage salmon farming," wrote the Pure Salmon Campaign.

The letter wishes Norwegian athletes well at the Olympics but adds: "It is a shame, however, that Norwegian salmon farming companies operating abroad are hurting Norway's international reputation. Far from making Norwegians proud, Cermaq, Grieg and Marine Harvest [three salmon farming companies] are disrespecting the views of First Nations communities and operating with contempt for the marine environment and health of wild salmon."

The letter quotes Chief Robert Joseph, of the Musgamagw Tsawataineuk Tribal Council, as saying first nations fear wild salmon stocks could be lost because of the impact of fish farms.

"The demise of wild salmon is tantamount to genocide because it reflects the demise of our culture, way of life and spirituality," said Chief Joseph.

The letter invites King Harald V to a salmon dinner hosted by first nations, and to meet with aboriginal leaders, scientists, wilderness tourism officials and fishermen.

Among those who signed the letter are David Suzuki, Executive Director of the David Suzuki Foundation, Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, Brian Gunn, President of the Wilderness Tourism Association of B.C., Geoff Meggs, a Councillor with the City of Vancouver, John Cummins, a Conservative MP, Des Nobles, a retired commercial salmon fisherman from Prince Rupert, Michael Price, a biologist with Raincoast Conservation Foundation, and Rafe Mair, a former B.C. cabinet minister and public commentator.

A protest rally is planned during the Olympic Games.



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