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National Post

Opinion

Fish science

Dr. Brian E Riddell, *Financial Post* · Thursday, Jun. 24, 2010

We are writing this letter together to put an end to the numerous attempts to fabricate scientific discord associated with the affects of aquaculture on wild Pacific salmon. The Canadian public will only benefit from abundant wild salmon and aquaculture if they have accurate information. Mr. Corcoran's exaggerations and misinformation are more damaging to the fish farm industry than the science he lashes out at in his column.

Every new industry matures as it develops and aquaculture does represent potential value to our coastal communities. But it must not jeopardize our wild Pacific salmon. Indeed, nowhere else in the world has open-net pen aquaculture existed with such an abundance of wild salmon, as present in British Columbia. To ensure wild Pacific salmon are sustained the ecological footprint of fish farming must meet the biological requirements of wild salmon. Mr. Corcoran seems to want to place the blame for the current situation on activists, but his conclusions are inaccurate and more fishy than any of the science he attempts to discredit.

For the record, first and foremost the claim that sea lice from fish farms in British Columbia were contaminating wild pink salmon is true. Without treatment for sea lice, the farms in the Broughton Archipelago were proven to be the major source of lice infecting juvenile pink salmon. The treatment of lice on farmed salmon, a plan developed through collaborative research in the archipelago, successfully reduced infection and proved that the farms were the primary source of infection. There really is no debate on this point.

Mr. Corcoran says, The great salmon farming scare proved to be a false alarm. This is incorrect. Declines in levels of sea lice are the result of a management (treatment) plan enacted in the Broughton Archipelago since 2007. Implementation of that plan is consistent with improved returns of pink salmon to the Broughton Archipelago in 2009.

Mr. Corcoran employs deliberately inflammatory language. As the primary author (Riddell) of the federal fisheries article rebutting the December 2007 extinction prediction article in *Science*, I have never referred to flawed science, cherry-picked data, or fudging the data. To infer attribution of these terms to me (Riddell) is totally inappropriate.

To his credit Mr. Corcoran has retained some important messages. I (Riddell) am concerned about the salmon farming experience around the world and I do question how environmentally justifiable open-net pen salmon farms are. Mr. Corcoran quotes Dr. Ben Koop, who rightly says science takes a lot of different perspectives and [then] combines and debates. This is exactly what has been occurring on the West Coast of Canada vis-a-vis aquaculture. We, as a community of scientists, acted and initiated the science that triggered management that has temporarily reduced sea lice. We did not wait to see if the extinction prediction was true or false. We are aware of strong indications worldwide that the current treatment measures may fail if or when the lice become drug-resistant. Therefore, the people involved must continue to develop solutions of which closed containment seems to be an increasingly attractive option.

Dr. Brian E Riddell, CEO, Pacific Salmon Foundation. Alexandra Morton, executive director, Raincoast Research Society

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