

## **DFO plans new rules to police salmon farming Fisheries department adding 50 staff in new \$8-million section**

By Scott Simpson, Vancouver Sun July 13, 2010



**Vancouver Sun Files / The Department of Fisheries and Oceans plans to hire up to 15 fisheries enforcement officers for B.C. salmon farms (Photograph by: Bill Keay, Vancouver Sun)**

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans expects to spend upwards of \$8 million a year on a new program to manage and police the British Columbia aquaculture industry, the department announced on Monday.

Acting on a 2009 B.C. Supreme Court ruling, the department is taking over from the provincial government as manager of B.C.'s roughly \$400-million aquaculture industry including salmon farming.

Trevor Swerdfager, director general of aquaculture management directorate at DFO, said during a teleconference that the department is creating a section of about 50 new staff – including 10 to 15 fisheries enforcement officers -- to manage the industry, which is the largest food production sector of the B.C. economy.

Salmon farming accounts for 90 per cent of the aquaculture industry's revenue. It has been dogged by controversy since its inception in the early 1980s, with opponents suggesting it is contributing to the decline of wild Pacific salmon.

The provincial government has been a strong proponent of salmon farming but in 2009 was removed from its role as manager of the industry when conservationists persuaded the B.C. Supreme Court that aquaculture was a fishery and therefore exclusively under the control of the federal Crown.

The feds have until Dec. 18 to develop a regime to regulate the fishery and this week announced a 60-day consultation period in which salmon farmers, first nations and the public can comment on proposed regulations.

Those regulations include new fees, licensing requirements, pollution management, fish health and sea lice management, and rules governing containment of fish.

Licence conditions will include requirements that salmon farmers take measures to minimize escapes – a persistent hazard for operators of open net sea pen farms, and compulsory release of information regarding fish health and sea lice management.

In order to qualify for licences, farm operators will also have to document releases into the ocean of deleterious substances such as fish feed and fish feces, blood water and disinfectants -and propose measures to mitigate the impacts of those releases upon marine habitat particularly in the vicinity of farms.

"We are looking at using the regulation to drive certain performance from the industry, to reward from an economic point of view what we consider to be positive environmental behaviour and performance through lower fees and to penalize or make more expensive operations that are not environmentally friendly," Swerdfager said.

"We think we will be in good shape ... to develop and deliver a fairly comprehensive program for the management of aquaculture in a way that certainly meets the decision from the British Columbia Supreme Court but also more broadly the needs of marine ecosystem management and sustainable development of the aquaculture sector."

B.C. Salmon Farmers Association executive director Mary Ellen Walling said in a telephone interview that the association supports DFO's efforts to make information about fish farming available for public scrutiny – as long as the need to keep proprietary information confidential is respected.

"You are seeing growing understanding among my companies that this is an important piece especially in British Columbia where we need to develop social licence – and information transparency is one way to do that."

Craig Orr, executive director of Watershed Watch Salmon Society, said he is concerned that DFO has not taken a position on shifting from open pen to closed containment pens for raising salmon.

"In Europe they have not recovered their wild fish populations despite coming up with regulations that are probably the best in the world for open net cage -- and we have smaller and more vulnerable wild fish."