

# Ministry must release sea lice records, commissioner rules

BY LARRY PYNN, VANCOUVER SUN MARCH 2, 2010

Environmental groups claimed a victory Monday after the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner ruled that the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands can no longer conceal records of sea lice infestations at coastal salmon farms.

The battle for access to sea lice records, led by the T. Buck Suzuki Environmental Foundation and Ecojustice, has been continuing since the ministry refused to release the information in 2004.

The ministry said it refused because fish farms supplied the information in confidence and because disclosure could harm the companies.

The new ruling acknowledges that release of the records may harm the reputations of salmon farms but held that the legislation does not protect companies from the public relations fallout from the public knowing about sea lice outbreaks.

The information must now be released within 30 days, provided that neither the ministry nor the salmon farm industry seeks a judicial review.

Clare Backman, spokesman for Marine Harvest, the province's largest salmon farmer, said the company now posts sea lice information on its website and has no plans to challenge the ruling. "It will be released and we're okay with that," he said.

Ministry officials were reviewing the decision before making a comment.

Salmon farms have long been accused of spreading sea lice to wild stocks.

The B.C. Pacific Salmon Forum found in 2009 that farmed and wild salmon can coexist, but recommended limits on salmon farming, including a cap on production in the Broughton Archipelago at current levels of 18,500 tonnes per year, and managing farms to meet sea-lice limits on young wild salmon.

[lpynn@vancouversun.com](mailto:lpynn@vancouversun.com)

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