

# DFO NATIONAL AQUACULTURE COMMUNICATIONS AND OUTREACH APPROACH

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## Executive Summary

This communications plan presents a proactive and gradually intensifying outreach approach to complement the development of Fisheries and Oceans Canada's Sustainable Aquaculture Program. It is designed to be implemented over three to five years. The communications activities and tactics are prioritized by audience and will be executed in three distinct phases.

Phase One is entitled "Identifying our Aquaculture Story" where proactive internal communications will be essential at the outset of the program development to raise knowledge and awareness of the DFO aquaculture program. Initial communications efforts will be focused on clarifying for departmental employees, provincial partners, industry stakeholders, the nature, mandate and scope of the DFO Sustainable Aquaculture Program.

Phase Two will focus on "Telling our Aquaculture Story" and expand to external audiences such as the media and general public through a series of strategic media and public outreach activities. Strategic use of multi-media tools, such as the website, trade-shows and science fora will assist in delivering a consistent message to build awareness and confidence in the government's management of the Canadian aquaculture industry.

Phase Three is entitled, "Engagement and Outreach - Strengthening our Aquaculture Message" where communications activities and tactics will expand the level of public outreach to include non-traditional stakeholders in a positive, solutions-oriented approach toward aquaculture management in Canada. Through interdepartmental collaboration and industry participation as required, DFO will lead strategic outreach activities with public health and food retail organizations across Canada to promote sustainable seafood messages.

Communications materials, tools and tactics will be collaboratively developed and vetted, as appropriate, through information networks and working groups implemented and led by DFO-Ottawa, in partnership with DFO's regions, officials within other government departments, provinces/territories colleagues, and industry.

## Sommaire de la direction

Ce plan de communications présente une démarche de sensibilisation proactive et progressive qui viendra compléter l'élaboration du Programme d'aquaculture durable de Pêches et Océans Canada. Le plan doit être mis en œuvre sur une période de trois à cinq ans. Les activités et stratégies de communications sont classées par ordre de priorité en fonction du public visé et elles seront mises à exécution en trois étapes distinctes.

La première étape s'intitule « Cerner notre message d'aquaculture ». Des communications internes proactives s'imposent dès le début de l'élaboration du programme d'aquaculture du MPO pour mieux le faire connaître. Les activités initiales de communications serviront à clarifier la nature, l'objet et la portée du Programme d'aquaculture durable du MPO auprès des employés du Ministère, de nos partenaires provinciaux et des intervenants de l'industrie.

La deuxième étape s'intitule « Diffuser notre message d'aquaculture ». S'ajouteront aux publics visés à la première étape les publics externes, par exemple les médias et le grand public, qui seront ciblés au moyen d'activités de sensibilisation stratégique. Nous aurons recours à divers médias, par exemple le site Web, les foires commerciales et les conférences scientifiques pour livrer un message cohérent et sensibiliser la population à la façon dont le gouvernement gère l'industrie canadienne de l'aquaculture, ce qui contribuera à rehausser la confiance des consommateurs.

La troisième étape s'intitule « Mobilisation et sensibilisation – Renforcer notre message d'aquaculture ». Les activités et stratégies de communications engloberont alors les intervenants non traditionnels et feront valoir que le Canada gère l'aquaculture selon une approche positive et axée sur les solutions. Misant au besoin sur la collaboration interministérielle et la participation de l'industrie, le MPO pilotera des activités de sensibilisation stratégique réalisées avec les organisations de santé publique et les détaillants en alimentation du Canada et diffusera des messages concernant la durabilité des produits de la mer.

Les documents, outils et stratégies de communications seront élaborés conjointement et validés, le cas échéant, auprès de réseaux d'information et de groupes de travail constitués et dirigés par le MPO-Ottawa, en partenariat avec les régions du MPO, les représentants des autres ministères, nos collègues des provinces et des territoires, et l'industrie.

## Background/Overview

The Government of Canada, through its new Sustainable Aquaculture Program, is looking to strengthen public confidence, increase transparency and build strategic inter-jurisdictional partnerships across the country as it relates to Canada's aquaculture industry.

As part of this commitment, Fisheries and Oceans Canada is developing a new, proactive communications approach towards aquaculture and its positioning with stakeholders.

While to date there has been no general consensus on the state of the aquaculture industry in Canada, some clear focuses are beginning to emerge.

A recent national stakeholder review has clearly demonstrated;

- 1) There is a significant need for increased employee/stakeholder communications within DFO surrounding aquaculture.
- 2) A national approach to aquaculture will only work in certain circumstances while in others a regional approach would be more successful
- 3) A very large component to the work needed surrounding aquaculture communications is grounded in a stakeholder relations exercise.
- 4) A national aquaculture strategy will have several sub components including
  - a. A Sea Lice communications Strategy for west coast (appendix A)
  - b. A sustainable seafood communications strategy (appendix B)

## Public Environment

The public environment surrounding aquaculture in Canada is as varied as the regions involved in it. From positive embracement in Newfoundland and Labrador to negative public opposition in British Columbia (53% opposed<sup>1</sup>), the industry is seen through different lenses depending on who you are and where you live.

While opposition is most prevalent on Canada's west coast with a very well organized, professional Environmental NGO group, there remains opportunities for aquaculture in that region.

As well, while there is virtually no opposition to aquaculture on Canada's east coast, there are potential issues looming and a proactive approach may be needed.

Overall the public environment surrounding aquaculture in Canada can be summed up into one key area – a confused and unaware public and consumer group that spends little time thinking beyond the headlines of the pros and cons of aquaculture in Canada.

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<sup>1</sup> 2006 DFO baseline survey

## Communications Objectives

- Strengthening public confidence.
- Increasing transparency to strengthen the way the Government of Canada presents information on the aquaculture industry in this country.
- To demonstrate that the Government of Canada is developing long-term strategic solutions to support the responsible growth of the sector based on a strong regulatory environment and sound science.
- To demonstrate the aquaculture industry is a responsible, legitimate and viable use of the marine resource.

## Target Audiences

- DFO Employees
- Provincial Governments
- Environmental NGO's
- Retailers
- Land Owners
- Media
- Other Federal departments
- Industry
- Traditional Fishery
- Consumers
- General Public

## Strategic Communications Considerations

### ***General***

A national approach will not work for all issues. Some of the challenges and opportunities are unique to specific regions across the country.

There is no short-term fix for addressing the challenges of aquaculture in Canada. Much like other controversial industries (forestry, oil and gas) time plays a key role in ensuring public understanding and awareness.

Throughout North America today there is an underlying mistrust of government.

The public has very little knowledge of the industry.

### ***Internal***

Depending on the role within the department or the region the employee works in there is a wide variance of opinions as to what DFO's role related to aquaculture is, should be and where the industry is going.

In some areas within DFO there is clear opposition to the department's involvement in aquaculture.

At times there appears to be a lack of consistency with DFO's legislative mandate and the way it actually operates.

## ***Methodology***

The development of the strategy evolved from a number of strategic sessions with various stakeholder groups both inside and external to DFO. These sessions were designed to gather all opinions of where the industry is today, to conduct a SWOT analysis and to determine common points of opinion that could lead to a more robust stakeholder relations opportunity where all sides in the debate are focused on the solutions –not the opposing points of view. Over 70 people were interviewed in total.

# Recommended Communications Approach (By Audience)

## ***Employees***

### ***Overview***

“Internal DFO communications is critical to the success of aquaculture and it has been overlooked. It will require a cultural shift within the department and that takes time. The Aquaculture Policy Framework has not really been implemented because that cultural shift hasn’t taken place. If we’re going to affect change it’s not about communicating out it’s about communicating in. As a department we are much better positioned to communicate externally. We have a problem with the majority of people not knowing the direction the program is going”<sup>2</sup>

This sentiment showcases a prevailing attitude by many stakeholders (both internal and external) across the country. Regardless of the issue or the region one of the underlying themes was an improved communications approach with DFO employees as it relates to aquaculture.

The following tactics are directed at improving internal communications at DFO regarding aquaculture.

### ***National Employee Communications***

#### **Aquaculture Mandate Review - Video**

Based on the fact that there are conflicting points of view as to DFO’s role relating to aquaculture, a formal review of the department’s role – shared through a video communiqué from the Minister and Deputy Minister – would help to ensure all employees can articulate DFO’s role moving forward.

The summary of this review (to be completed by the recently formed aquaculture committee and including all clear program deliverables as well as an audit of regulatory delivery across the country) should be delivered to all employees through a video of the Minister and Deputy outlining the role of the department in aquaculture and the department’s commitment to the industry. This will help to alleviate any possible misunderstanding of interpretation by employees. Through a strategic roll-out of the video across the department, using a number of outreach tools (In the Loop message, DFO intranet, speaking opportunities), all employees should be encouraged to watch and understand the video. This is a first step in refocusing aquaculture communications across the country. Until DFO employees are comfortable with the planned role for the department in the industry’s evolution it will be very difficult to change other stakeholder perceptions.

This video could also be modified for use with external audiences as many of those opposed to aquaculture have begun using the social media channels to communicate. A clear and concise overview of DFO’s role in aquaculture would showcase what the department is doing and what it is precisely responsible for.

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<sup>2</sup> DFO Stakeholder Review - 2008

## **Regular Updates from Aquaculture Division**

Through email links driving DFO employees to the website or through dedicated communication to employees using existing internal communications tools, such as *In The Loop* and the *Oceans* newsletter, it is important to ensure that DFO employees be able to communicate at least the basic functions of the department as it relates to aquaculture and the department's mandate for the industry.

While there are a few employees dedicated to aquaculture, many employees have an opinion which they are very willing to share - whether it is based in fact or not. Some proactive communications to better educate the employees will help to ensure that the day to day communications with other stakeholders is more accurate and better reflects the department's overall mandate.

Through this regular communication it is also important to begin to shift the focus away from Salmon aquaculture only and educate employees as to the diverse sectors within the aquaculture industry. From new species of finfish, to shellfish – the industry is much more diverse than the current communications would indicate.

## **National Aquaculture Science Summit**

Region by region across the country there is exciting and groundbreaking scientific research taking place by DFO scientists in the area of aquaculture. One issue is that there are clearly differing points on view on the results of that science and its importance on advancing the industry. One way to address this is to bring all aquaculture scientists together on a yearly basis – such as the annual face-to-face Aquaculture Collaborative Research and Development Program workshop and/or the science-focussed Aquaculture Association of Canada Conference – to highlight and review their research and to determine key areas of focus moving forward. It is strongly recommended that a communications resource participate in these yearly summits to help identify key communications opportunities for the department. This will help to lead to science communications plans for each region.

## **Communications Training**

Communications/media training should be consistently and regularly offered to DFO employees who may have occasion to talk to media and external stakeholders. Particularly in the areas of science and regulatory management it is important that all employees receives regular training and practice to ensure they are comfortable in communicating externally and understand the needs to drive home key departmental messages.

## **Development of Communications Protocol**

There remains a great deal of confusion over who's role it is to communicate and when regarding aquaculture in DFO. Is it Communication's role to drive internal or external communications? Is it Aquaculture Management Directorate's? Is it science's role?

It is recommended to develop a two-track communications approach;

- 1) science-based communications
- 2) non-science based communications



Working with key stakeholders within the department (following the aquaculture mandate review), develop a simple directive on whose role it is to communicate regarding aquaculture. This will form part of a broader communications protocol to be developed with the industry (see industry) and the Provincial Governments (see provincial government departments)

## **Regional Employee Communications**

### **Regular talking Points/Key Messages**

Because advocacy groups who oppose the aquaculture industry are well financed and media savvy, it has created a difficult environment for DFO employees in which to operate. In some cases DFO employees have adopted some or all of the sentiments articulated by ENGOs making it even more difficult for a clear Government of Canada message to be delivered. As a result, DFO employees need more communications support and materials to help communicate the department's role and mandate on a day to day basis. Communications material around key issues, in the form of a Quick Response Binder, should be provided to employees to allow them to communicate on a daily basis with their key stakeholders. Topics should include frequently raised issues such as: Sea Lice, DFO Mandate, Site Access, Escapes, Food Safety, Waste Management, Advancements and evolution of the industry to name a few.

### **Profile and Recognition of Freshwater Aquaculture**

Canada can boast that it has a very successful freshwater aquaculture industry, operating in each Canadian province and the Yukon Territory. Unfortunately and understandably this tends to get overlooked in the day to day challenges within the department as it relates to marine aquaculture, particularly salmon, on Canada's east and west coasts. The fact remains that there is an enormous amount of knowledge and pride that exists with DFO employees. This should be highlighted and communicated to DFO employees nationally. It will help to accomplish two key things;

- 1) Create increased engagement on the freshwater aquaculture file by Central and Arctic and Quebec Region employees; and,
- 2) Help to educate the employees in other regions about the successful freshwater aquaculture industry in Canada.

### **Stakeholder Relations Messaging**

Some concern was expressed during the stakeholder review that many of the myths regarding aquaculture may be driven, in part, by DFO employees who live and work in coastal communities. There is a belief that some DFO employees who work with the traditional fishery in these regions may actually help to drive and perpetuate the myths regarding aquaculture and its impact on the traditional fishery.

It is so important to ensure that all DFO employees understand the facts surrounding any element of the department that may become part of their day-to-day communications.

It is strongly recommended that the RDG work with management in the region to ensure that all employees are able to communicate properly with all stakeholders – using facts and departmental direction as the basis for everything.

### **Employee Orientation Program**

A great recommendation from the stakeholder review is the idea of an employee orientation program that clearly outlines the roles and responsibilities within DFO as it relates to aquaculture and the Department's mandate externally. Using new technologies, including the video and Quick Response Binder mentioned above, an employee orientation program could be developed that could be used by DFO employees – creating an interactive and engaging experience. New technology available allows for inexpensive yet engaging employee training solutions that can be easily adapted for updates and easily delivered in both of Canada's official languages.

### **Front line Employee Communications**

At the local level it is very important that DFO employees be aware of the department's role, the issues, mitigation tactics and the way to refute inaccuracies along the way. This can be delivered through an employee orientation program or an RDG training/communications program as was mentioned for some other regions.

## **Other Federal Departments**

### **Overview**

It is clear that the issues surrounding aquaculture transcend departmental lines and tend to involve a number of federal government departments including;

- CFIA
- Health Canada
- Environment
- ACOA
- Transport Canada
- Agriculture Canada

While many of these departments end up communicating about farmed salmon or the aquaculture industry in Canada, it is clear that they have not consulted the resident experts within DFO to determine if their facts and messaging are correct.

### **Government of Canada - Aquaculture Communications Protocol**

When the Government of Canada is communicating anything about aquaculture it should be using the latest facts and figures as determined by DFO. A number of Department's currently have outdated terminology or positioning of the aquaculture industry including in websites and promotional material.

Through the Minister or the Deputy, a GoC communications protocol should be developed so ensure that all external communications from other departments regarding aquaculture has been vetted by DFO to ensure it is using the latest terminology, facts and positioning.

## Government of Canada Aquaculture Communications Network

Likewise it is important that DFO continue to educate key departments on advancements and positioning on a regular basis. As a function of the manager of aquaculture communications, regular communications updates should be sent to key departmental contacts in other stakeholder departments.

## Provincial Governments

### Overview

Through the MOU's, the majority of provinces are key partners in the delivery of a national aquaculture program. The issues tend to be created when it comes to the interpretation of the current regulations from province to province. As well, there is inconsistency in the way Provinces are willing to work with DFO on the communication around aquaculture development and regulation.

### *National Aquaculture Communications Team/Protocol*

Driven by DFO, this national team would create a network of communications professionals who could collaborate on the communication of regional and national issues that relate to the industry, its regulation and its development.

This team would also develop a communications protocol to ensure there is consistency with government communication surrounding aquaculture throughout the country. There are often opportunities through issue management for both DFO and the Province of BC to explain their roles in managing the aquaculture industry.

It is recommended that the division of communication be determined along the mandate's of individual organizations. Some suggestions for this protocol include:

<b>Role</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
Licensing	Province
Fish health audits and surveillance	Province
Inspections and compliance	Province
Seafood Development	Province
Waste regulations and monitoring	Province
Species at Risk	DFO
Overarching ecological and socio-economic elements	DFO
First Nations Involvement	DFO
Habitats Assessment	DFO
Science (including water quality, biodiversity, fish habitat, fisheries resources, species impacts)	DFO

# Industry

## Overview

The aquaculture industry in Canada is made up of several players (both local and multi-national) that cross species and provincial jurisdictions.

Until recently the industry was self-admittedly not well organized. The industry had adopted a philosophy of “stay under the radar” and was not in favour of proactive mitigation to offset inevitable criticism. Now each of the industry associations (both national and provincial) has a renewed commitment to proactive communications and an increased understanding of the importance of factual and real communications.

Also, until recently the willingness of the industry to work with DFO was inconsistent. Some cited DFO’s decision to contract with ENGO activist Alexandra Morton as one reason they lost “trust” in the department.

There also exists a real difference in opinion as to the role of DFO by DFO itself and the industry producers. While some in DFO believe it is the department’s responsibility to promote the industry, all industry players who participated in the stakeholder audit are looking to DFO to provide good leadership and guidance, sound policy decisions and neutral science that forms part of the decision-making on policy and evolution.

## **National Communications/Issues Team and Protocol**

Many times during the year there are opportunities for a coordinated communications approach between DFO, the Province or Provinces and the Industry Producers. Whether it’s about growth and evolution, science-based policy decisions, scientific discovery or regulatory requirements, each of these stakeholders has a communications role to play.

To date this has not been well coordinated and left room for media (particularly those media with a clear anti-aquaculture agenda) the ability to position a strong and direct message from aquaculture opponents and a confused or inconsistent response (if any) from industry and government.

A similar protocol as will be developed between various departments and levels of government should be developed by the industry and government. There should be agreement on who will speak about what and when. Suggestions for this protocol include:

Site Issues/opportunities	Industry Producer
Regional Issues/opportunities	Industry Association/Province
National Issue/opportunities	DFO
Scientific discoveries	DFO, Province and Industry
Environmental stewardship	DFO, Province and Industry
Policy decisions (based on science)	DFO, Province
Socio-economic	DFO, Province
Environmental issues	DFO, Province

Regulatory regime	DFO, Province
Broad Industry Direction	DFO
Marketing	Industry/Associations
Food Safety/Nutritional health benefits	Federal Government
Certification	Industry/Associations
Sustainability	All

This group should also form an issues/opportunities team that can bring regional and national players together for a timely and coordinated response to issues and opportunities across the country and from around the world.

It is recommended that this team be created and chaired by DFO Communications-NCR in collaboration with communications advisors across the department.

### **Messaging/Resource Database**

All the industry associations, the individual companies along with each province and DFO have developed key messages, fact sheets, information sheets and other communications materials and resources yet when a new issue for one player arises; they are forced to start over again - creating time delays and potential inconsistencies.

It is strongly recommended that a national selection of communications materials be collected and stored in one place to integrate messaging for all external stakeholders.

### **Evolution of Aquaculture Industry Fact Sheet**

One sentiment that was repeated on a number of occasions is that the industry has evolved substantially over the past 10 years. Stakeholders from all areas of the industry repeatedly referred to the real advancements made by the industry and government in the areas of environmental stewardship, food safety, escapes, overcrowding, regulation, roles and responsibilities etc. This evolution fact sheet could be used by all players to rebuff inaccurate or old information regarding Canada's aquaculture industry.

### **Increased Communication on Good News Aquaculture Stories**

Working with industry partners and provincial counterparts develop a "good news" story list on new and exciting breakthroughs and advancements for the industry. Stories should be developed and issued through various media channels including;

- Websites
- Industry publications
- Mainstream media
- Speeches/presentations

Where possible, some of these media stories could be visually presented and delivered through new, popular social media channels such as YouTube and Facebook.

### **Certification**

One area getting increasing focus is certification of farmed salmon. Essentially taking steps to have the salmon product certified eco-friendly or organic. While the majority of

stakeholders agree with this recommendation, how it is done and by which standard remains a topic of debate.

From a DFO perspective, it is recommended that the department promote and support certification as another measure of the sustainable and regulated nature of the industry. Beyond that DFO should leave certification to the industry producers and consumers to determine which process would be best accepted.

## **Environmental NGOs**

### **Overview**

Primarily an issue on the west coast, Environmental NGOs have focused on Canada's aquaculture industry as a target to further their agenda and fundraising efforts.

In fact, many of the issues already identified (lack of a strong national association; reactive vs. proactive) have created an environment conducive to creating strong public opposition towards the industry.

Most prominent in this group includes Alexandra Morton (Raincoast Research Society) and David Suzuki (David Suzuki Foundation) both of whom have become high profiled media celebrities who have gained a relatively small but loyal following of supporters willing to communicate their message at every opportunity. As well they have created some false concerns in other parts of Canada over the impact of things like sea lice and species interaction.

Using arguments based in science, these prominent ENGOs have mastered the use of mainstream and social media and have created a confused public who tend to drift towards believing the simplest and easiest argument "aquaculture is bad."

### **National Aquaculture Science Forum**

The only way to create a dialogue of facts is to question the science-based arguments made by ENGOs and allow them to openly question the science coming from DFO. As part of a true "peer" review, it is recommended that DFO scientists invite ENGOs and others involved in aquaculture scientific research to a Science Forum to share learning's, ask questions and talk about possible solutions/outcomes that could have a positive impact on the industry and the environment.

This Scientific Forum could lead to improvements in policy decisions, stock choices, locations for growth etc.

To avoid a media frenzy, both sides would agree to issue a joint statement at the end of the forum talking about outcomes and next steps.

### **Acknowledgement of Facts**

One way of reducing the impact the ENGO message has on consumers and the general public's perception is to agree, where appropriate, and begin shifting the public dialogue past accusations and arguments and towards solutions.

One example of this was the planned release with the Province of BC that did not get released. Essentially government was willing to admit that sea lice might indeed have an impact on wild salmon stocks and immediately shift the dialogue to solutions and options. This would show willingness on the part of government to work with all stakeholders and consider all opinions in the search for a truly sustainable industry that meets social, economic and environmental demands.

## **National Aquaculture Forum**

Another option to help shift the dialogue from blame and accusation to solutions and options is to bring more public attention to the industry and all points of view.

A national forum on aquaculture could bring all stakeholders together to discuss the industry, where it has come from and where it is going. It could feature outcomes from the National Science Forum, could allow industry players to interact with ENGOs and government and begin discussions on ways to continue to improve the industry while continuing to meet a global demand for safe and healthy food.

This forum could feature speakers from Industry, Government and the ENGOs and could be open to journalists and other key stakeholders.

The forum could be held every 2 years and could shift locations from West to East to highlight innovative and new advancements in the industry from coast to coast.

## **Joint Research Partnerships**

Working with a respected and neutral NGO on key research projects is another way to showcase the department's willingness to work with all stakeholders to ensure the most sustainable aquaculture industry possible. The two organizations most cited during the stakeholder review were World Wildlife Fund (Salmon Aquaculture Dialogue) and the Coastal Alliance for Aquaculture Reform. By forming a strategic alliance with these groups, DFO may be able to work with them to find key areas of agreement on the future growth of aquaculture.

## **Traditional Fishery**

### ***Overview***

Clearly one sector within the fishery industry that has show opposition towards aquaculture is the traditional fishery. Whether it's a redirection of DFO resources and focus, competition for ocean space or more specific region issues, the traditional fishery has not always been a proponent of a successful aquaculture industry.

While we have seen improvements in this relationship in the past 5 years, new talks of expanding aquaculture offshore have raised concerns again from the traditional fishery that an expanded aquaculture industry will negatively impact their livelihood.

## **Opportunities Identification**

For a number of traditional fishermen the growing aquaculture industry over the past 20 years has created unwanted challenges. For some there is a belief that government has shifted its priorities from a robust and sustainable traditional fishery to supporting a fledgling aquaculture industry. They believe they are competing for resources and priority.

For many of these fishermen they have also seen a significant decline in their own fishery because of declining stocks (cod) or increased global competition (herring).

There exists an opportunity to work with the traditional fishery to highlight opportunities that exist within an expanding and growing aquaculture industry. DFO is well positioned to work with these traditional fishermen to identify opportunities with offshore and new species aquaculture. This will allow this very important and respected labour force to continue to make a living on the ocean while at the same time increasing support for the growth of the aquaculture industry.

This opportunities identification needs to be handled on a regional basis and should be directed through traditional fisheries associations and leaders in the traditional fishery sector.

## ***Communication of Bay Management Programs***

In recent years, the development of Bay Management programs on Canada's east coast in relation to aquaculture has helped to alleviate many concerns over the development of aquaculture by providing a forum for all points of view to be heard and considered. This type of program could provide a new forum for dialogue on Canada's west coast if measures to move the provincial government towards this concept could prove successful.

## **Retailers**

### ***Overview***

The majority of the retailers buying farmed salmon from Canada exist within the US market. Only Cook Aquaculture sells as much as 50% of its production in Canada with other major producers selling as much as 90% to the US market.

While many of the communication issues facing the industry in Canada have not become as prevalent, there exists a possibility that continued public focus on the negatives of aquaculture could have a negative impact on market sales in the US.

Already there have been examples of major US retailers who are asking questions about the impacts of sea lice and the health and safety of farmed salmon. It's also important to mention that the flip side of this is an ever increasing demand for the salmon product.



## **Retailer Education Program**

While some may claim as a responsibility of each individual producer, there is an opportunity for DFO to provide a government endorsed education program for retailers buying farmed Canadian Salmon.

One example already in use is the program launched three years ago by Cooke Aquaculture around their Heritage Salmon line. The program consists of professionally produced guides to outline the benefits of farmed salmon, dispel the myths of farmed salmon, how to store and display farmed salmon, cooking options, the health benefits of eating salmon etc. This guide is designed for the seafood manager and staff to talk in an educated way to the questions consumers are asking.

Because not all industry producers have taken this step, there is an opportunity for DFO to work with the industry to produce this retailer training and education program to explain how the department manages the aquaculture industry in a sustainable and responsible manner. The philosophy is simple – by providing the retailer with accurate information they will be able to more accurately inform consumers. Communication activities and tools developed under the department's Sustainable Seafood Strategy should be complementary to tactics undertaken to tell the aquaculture story.

## ***Restaurateurs Program***

There has been a lot of chatter created over whether or not certain chefs will use farmed salmon in their restaurant. The labelling of Fresh Wild Salmon has created a consumer demanding wild salmon without understanding why or educating themselves on the benefits of farmed salmon.

It is recommended that DFO work with the industry (who should lead fund this) and provinces to identify a celebrity chef (one in Canada and one in US) who could help to raise the profile of cooking with farmed salmon and highlight the health benefits, the regulation and monitoring of the industry and the ongoing research and development to ensuring its sustainability.

In addition, chefs can remind people of the other farmed seafood products we have all come to love including shellfish, trout etc available fresh across the country.

## ***Benefits of Seafood Campaign***

DFO, working with other key government departments (health etc) could work on a retailer/consumer based campaign to highlight the benefits of seafood as part of your healthy diet and reinforce the health benefits of farmed salmon, shellfish and farmed trout etc.

The campaign can highlight the nutritional and health related benefits, outline the monitoring and regulatory regime that oversees Canada's aquaculture industry and use a key independent spokesperson to outline the benefits and ways of consuming seafood. One example is the recent partnership between McCain Foods and Canadian nutritionist Rose Reisman (<http://www.livingwell.mccain.ca/>). Rose is working with McCain Foods to dispel the myths about French fries and potatoes and helping to educate a market place about a well balanced diet.

Agriculture and AgriFood Canada have partnered with Rosie Schwartz, a well-known dietician and media personality, to promote the health benefits of consuming fish and seafood (wild and farmed). DFO, in collaboration with other federal departments and agencies, could consider furthering this partnership to explain a consistent Government of Canada message toward the health and lifestyle benefits of consuming fish and seafood.

## Consumers

The one group probably most confused about all the public debate surrounding aquaculture is the seafood consumer.

For the majority of North Americans, where their food comes from is not a topic of concern. However with recall issues like the recent recall by Maple Leaf Foods, consumers are increasingly moving towards asking key questions based on what they read in the newspaper or see on the evening news. This is both a threat and an opportunity for the aquaculture industry in Canada moving forward.

Consumers, more than ever, are using technology to research questions they may have. The internet is becoming the most used research tool for consumers. The issue with the internet is that it is filled with accurate and inaccurate information. Consumers then rely on chat rooms and social media sites for other opinions.

A quick search of these sites today and the one message consumers would leave with is that farmed salmon is bad for the environment and your health. However, by using these sites in a strategic manner, DFO has the opportunity to accurately educate consumers on the benefits of seafood, the regulatory regime under which farmed salmon is harvested and the controls in place to ensure the utmost safety and a sustainable industry.

### DFO's Role in Aquaculture – VIDEO

Either by capturing the information in a planned speech or by creating a venue, DFO could clearly showcase the department's role in aquaculture in Canada through a speech/presentation presented on the DFO website and available through key social media sites like [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com).

One clear and palatable way of presenting this would be a Q and A type format with the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and a few key scientists taking questions about the aquaculture industry and the department's role.

A quick search of the term "aquaculture" on YouTube produced over 500 video clips – the majority opposing the industry and the purported benefits of farmed salmon. By effectively using this medium, the department can begin to clearly articulate its role and the overall benefits of the aquaculture industry in Canada and around the world.

Already one of the larger salmon producers (Marine Harvest) is beginning to use this medium to deal with specific issues on sea lice, the actual process of fish farming etc. As well, you can find clips showcasing farmed PEI mussels, freshwater trout farms etc.

## **Consumer Focused Web Site**

Using much of the same information developed for the retailer education program, this website can highlight everything a consumer needs to know about aquaculture in Canada.

While DFO's website on aquaculture today is filled with useful information is not consumer focused and is designed and presented much like a government web site.

As well, a Google search on "farmed salmon" took several pages before finding the DFO web site on aquaculture.

While it is clear that virtually none of the aquaculture stakeholders believe that marketing is part of DFO's role, the sustainable development mandate clearly leaves room for the department to present a neutral consumer focused look at farmed seafood in Canada.

## **General Public/Media**

For the most part, and aside from Canada's west coast, the general public and the media don't spend a great deal of time discussing aquaculture in Canada.

In BC, there is a clear difference with the media and the general public as is demonstrated by the continued negative attention by some key media outlets on the aquaculture industry and the ENGOs that oppose it.

In particular Mark Hume and Stephen Hume, Scott Simpson and Judy Lavoy tend to focus on the negatives of aquaculture, present one-sided opposition and don't work towards presenting a balanced story.

Yet the situation is not as bad as it seems. Previous examples of proactively trying to engage the media on aquaculture education proved successful and have left room for more. As well, the industry associations in BC and nationally have launched a renewed commitment to communications and media relations that will begin to shift the balance of the coverage to a more neutral stance.

What remains is the role for DFO in communicating about aquaculture through the media to the general public.

### ***Media Protocol***

While mentioned in previous sections, this media protocol will help to guide the department's role in media relations surrounding aquaculture in Canada. The majority of stakeholders identified DFO's communications role as;

- Talk about the science being conducted and its outcomes
- Talk about the regulatory regime the industry works under
- Talk about policy and the benefits of the industry to the Canadian economy and to the health of Canadians.

By sticking to these topics, it will become quite clear that DFO will become the "go-to" organization for media in three key areas, but when it comes to specific issues or

regional concerns, the province or the industry would be a better place to go. It would also help to establish DFO's credibility on the regulatory regime.

### **Media Spokespeople**

Media spokespeople for DFO need to present thoughtful and reassuring confidence in the regulatory and health safety areas of aquaculture. Those discussing science need to be able to articulate complicated ideas in simple, clear and compelling ways. Those discussing the socio-economic impacts of aquaculture on the country need to be able to present accurate facts in a professional and compelling manner.

This requires a commitment to training and a broader identification of potential spokespeople. As well, the department needs to have a comprehensive database of approved messaging on topics related to regulatory, science and safety and be able to disseminate those on a regular and proactive basis through public communication, in speeches of ministers and MPs, through social media channels and websites etc.

### **Media Tours**

Media would be able to get a very different picture of Canada's aquaculture industry if it were able to travel coast to coast and meet with stakeholders from all sides of the industry. While this is not possible logistically, it doesn't mean that national media couldn't construct a national story from a series of regional reports. This will require a strong relationship with the key national media including CTV, CBC, Global, Globe and Mail and the National Post. Finding the right hook could create enough interest for a series of stories on the real aquaculture industry in Canada. It could highlight the challenges and opportunities and the differences aquaculture has made on the lives of many Canadians. It could follow the salmon direct to a consumer in the US who relies on this safe form of protein as part of a healthy diet. It could talk about the evolution of the industry from not so good to world leader. It is recommended that one media outlet be targeted and that DFO provide as much logistical support as possible to help the story become reality. While it won't be 100% positive towards the industry and it will highlight the opposition towards the industry it will paint a complete picture of the social, economic and environmental benefits the industry is committed to providing.

This [link](#) is an interesting view of the aquaculture industry in the UK and its impact for all stakeholders.

## **Execution/Work Plan**

While many potential tactics have been identified for each stakeholder group, there are key initiatives that will lay a foundation for others in the plan.

As noted in the Executive Summary, the execution portion has divided the initiatives into three phases which can, in some cases, be delivered simultaneously based on commitment and resource levels. The tactic is identified with the lead group or division as well as the audience it will have the most impact on. Refer to Annex B, an Excel spreadsheet, for further details.