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Aquaculture plan moving forward

By [BRUCE ERSKINE Business Reporter](#)

Outbreak of salmon anemia not affecting Cooke's plans

The latest confirmed outbreak of infectious salmon anemia at a Cooke Aquaculture site in Nova Scotia isn't changing the company's ambitious expansion plans in the province.

"We take it very seriously but it doesn't change our overall plans for Nova Scotia," Cooke spokeswoman Nell Halse said in an interview from the New Brunswick company's headquarters Thursday.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency confirmed the outbreak, which occurred in two pens at a Cooke fish farm off Coffin Island near Liverpool and prompted the company to destroy about 40,000 fish.

"The quarantine placed on the facility on June 15, 2012, remains to control movements of people, vessels, equipment and fish onto or off of the site," inspection agency spokeswoman Elena Koutsavakis said Thursday in an email from Ottawa.

"The agency will continue to monitor and test the rest of the salmon at the facility. If additional cases of infectious salmon anemia are confirmed, more fish may be ordered destroyed."

Earlier this year, the federal agency ordered the destruction of several hundred thousand farmed salmon after an outbreak of the disease at a Cooke-owned open-pen salmon farm outside Shelburne Harbour.

Cooke was compensated for that kill since it was ordered by the agency, but Halse said it was unclear if there would be any compensation in the Liverpool case, where Cooke destroyed the fish voluntarily.

Cooke has 10 aquaculture operations stocked with three million fish in Nova Scotia — three in the Shelburne area that are currently fallow, one off Brier Island that is fallow, one off Saddle Island near Bayswater Beach in St. Margaret's Bay, two in Digby Harbour, two on St. Mary's Bay near Digby Neck and one in Liverpool, Halse said.

The company recently received Transport Canada approval to move ahead with a proposal to open two new farms in Jordan Bay, Shelburne County. And Halse said Cooke is actively pursuing plans to build a processing plant in the Shelburne area and a hatchery near Digby.

Cooke has encountered different strains of infectious salmon anemia, Halse said, which is one of the reasons it has spread out its farm operations around the province.

“We can rotate our crops,” she said, which helps manage parasite and disease issues.

The Nova Scotia government, which is providing Cooke with millions in loans to expand its aquaculture operations in the province, considers infectious salmon anemia a manageable agricultural disease.

Fisheries and Aquaculture Minister Sterling Belliveau said it’s unfortunate to have another case of the disease in Nova Scotia, but the Canadian Food Inspection Agency has the necessary procedures in place.

“If you look across the world, this is a disease that is being managed by the industry; it’s like any other animal disease,” Belliveau said Thursday. “They have protocols in place.”

But critics say the latest outbreak is indicative of the threat that large-scale open-pen salmon farms pose to the natural marine environment and to traditional wild fisheries.

“It highlights our belief that there’s a need for a physical barrier between fish farms and the wild,” said Lewis Hinks, director of programs for the Atlantic Salmon Federation in Nova Scotia.

With David Jackson, provincial reporter

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