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## Nova Scotia aquaculture transparency 'improvement' questioned

**'I don't think this is fair and transparent,' says aquaculture opponent**

By Paul Withers



A fishing boat heads past fish farm cages in Shelburne Harbour on Nova Scotia's South Shore in 2011. Nova Scotia says it's more open about aquaculture management now, but opponents question how well licence renewals are being advertised. (Andrew Vaughan/The Canadian Press)

Nova Scotia's claim that it is more open in managing fish farms is being attacked by aquaculture opponents.

That's as Cooke Aquaculture seeks a licence renewal for a large fish farm in Shelburne Harbour on the South Shore.

Cooke Aquaculture subsidiary Kelly Cove Salmon has applied to the province for a 10-year lease renewal for its 20-hectare salmon and trout farm in Shelburne Harbour.

That was news to local aquaculture opponent Shelly Hipson.

"We stumbled upon it on [the government's] website," she said Friday. "They didn't put it in the local paper or tell the community there was such a renewal in process. I don't think this is fair and transparent."

- [New Nova Scotia aquaculture regulations 'more accountable'](#)

The 30-day notice for public comment had run a couple of weeks before Hipson discovered it. The deadline was Friday.

"I think it's sneaky," she said.

## **'Major improvement'**

But Nova Scotia Aquaculture Minister Keith Colwell said this is a case of being more transparent.

New rules brought in by the Liberals now require public notice of site renewals, giving the public a chance to review them.

Farm-specific management plans also must be submitted for the first time.

"It's a major improvement. In the past nobody had to be notified. Staff would do a review," Colwell said.

"If there's absolutely no big issues, renew it almost automatically and land on the minister's desk, be signed off on and done."

Nova Scotia Fisheries Minister Keith Colwell says aquaculture licence renewal is more transparent than ever, despite criticisms. (CBC)

## **15 approved in 2015**

Renewal applications now are posted on the Fisheries and Aquaculture website and in the Nova Scotia Gazette, an online registry.

Colwell said notice on the websites and the 30-day limit for public comment is adequate for renewals.

Since 2015 the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture has approved all 15 marine fin fish renewal applications it has received from several companies.

## **Many applications with no public response**

Kelly Cove Salmon Ltd has had four 10-year site licence renewals approved in 2016 so far.

Several applications received zero public submissions, including the renewal of an eight-hectare fish farm, also in Shelburne Harbour, operated by Ocean Trout Farms.

That could indicate no one knew about the renewal application, or no one cared.

## Complaints about Kelly Cove Salmon site

Two 10-year licence renewals issued last month for Kelly Cove Salmon sites in the Annapolis Basin did garner public response.

In both cases, the company was told to address complaints.

One site just south of the Digby to Saint John ferry terminal received five submissions on a variety of issues:

- Noise.
- Debris.
- Gear outside boundaries.
- Environmental performance.
- Impact on nearby lobster grounds.

The company has been given until Oct. 26 to submit a farm management plan to address those concerns.

"As people see this thing roll out and how it all works for the approval process, they will see it's much more open," Colwell said.

## 'I don't think it's appropriate'

Hipson and other opponents of the Kelly Cove Salmon application in Shelburne Harbour argued Site 0602, as it's known, is not suitable for a large-scale fish farm.

"The site was given back to the province by Kelly Cove some years ago, and now probably within 80 metres they are looking at opening up again," Hipson said.

"I think it's toxic and I don't think it's appropriate."



Kelly Cove Salmon wants to change a fish farm in Shelburne Harbour, Site 0602. (Nova Scotia Fisheries and Aquaculture)

## **'Misinformation,' says company**

Cooke spokesman Nell Halse called that "misinformation."

She said Cooke acquired the site from a different owner several years ago, and immediately applied to move it because the original location had poor environmental performance.

"We have been on that site for some time and ratings are fine. We have also fallowed the site regularly, a practice that was not followed by the previous owner," Halse said in an email statement to CBC News.

## **'Support the principle of transparency'**

She said nothing will be changed at the site, and welcomed increased public scrutiny.

"The new process does add additional administration costs to the business," her statement said. "But we support the principle of transparency, especially if it helps the communities and our neighbours see for themselves that we are complying with regulations and operating to a high standard."

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/aquaculture-fish-farm-licence-cooke-kelly-cove-salmon-1.3728537>