

# Natural fit? No way! Fish farms net loss for St. Mary's Bay

BY KAREN CROCKER

In Nova Scotia, we are reluctantly in the midst of a grand experiment:

“Let’s try open net pen fish farming, and see how things work out. We’ll do it in a few isolated coastal communities. Not many people live there ... they don’t have a voice. And we’ll promise lots of jobs. The community needs jobs. They’ll love it..”

This appears to be the essence of the shockingly reckless bet our provincial government has wagered. Well, if you happened to live in one of these fish farming communities, you might think differently than our government.

When city bureaucrats presume to have intimate knowledge of life in coastal Nova Scotia and tell us how to do it “right,” we become cynical and annoyed.

Don’t worry, they say, “it’s a natural fit.” We hear this time and again from Fisheries Minister Sterling Belliveau. Is he trying to convince us, or simply himself?

All OK and a natural fit? When after a single production cycle, in our so called heavy flush area in St. Mary’s Bay, there now washes a brown smelly sludge into our harbour. A sludge that fouls the bottom of our boats we cannot scrape off. Thanks, Mr. Minister.

We love the natural fit of Cooke Aquaculture’s 208 acres of salmon cesspools now encompassing the fishing grounds of 23 local boats. We love the sound of the whining generators, drifting over the village on any given day.

We can’t thank the NDP enough for washed-away predator nets that come up entangled in our traps and lines. And, when site boats sail, carelessly cutting off our buoys and sinking our gear, we love replacing those traps at \$200 apiece, plus losing the lobster in them.

And finally, we are so pleased to have the disharmony that Cooke brings to our community — trying to pit neighbour against neighbour. Thanks a lot, everybody.

But the minister still stays on message: “It’s a natural fit. We have good science.” The presumption is that things are great.

Well, for Glenn Cooke, things may be. He pulls out millions of dollars each St. Mary’s cycle. And what do we receive? Nothing but trouble. We’ve listed some of it above.

Now, Mr. Minister, if you didn’t receive a clear message from the petition opposing open-net fish farms signed by over 80 per cent of our islands’ residents, or the public protest in Halifax and at the Sandy Cove fire hall at our “consultation,” or the hundreds of letters from residents, fishermen, business owners, community groups and organizations wherever these open-net farms have been located, or the fact that our communities are suing you for locating these feedlots in our bay, please consider this:

The jig is up. The writing is on the wall. Might we remind you, not so long ago the collapse of Canada’s cod resource wreaked havoc upon fishing villages that depended upon these same fish for their livelihoods. Communities were destroyed. Villages had to be abandoned because there were no fish.

When industrial open-net fish farms foul our coastlines and foul our waters, we too will no longer have livelihoods. It is an environmental, economic and social disaster waiting to happen.

How’s that for a natural fit?

Let us be perfectly clear. These open-net farms will cause the eventual destruction of the inshore marine resources, and the economic destruction of the communities that rely upon local fisheries and eco-tourism.

If it is the government’s intent that this type of aquaculture supplant these current industries (and all in the name of progress), then we have a very big problem.

They provide communities only a handful of jobs, and will leave hundreds without their traditional livelihoods. Communities will be destroyed.

So, how’s that for a natural fit? Communities are being forced to accept a bad neighbour — an industrial nuisance, that gives them nothing back.

Moreover, this neighbour depletes what we already have. Nova Scotia's greatest asset is a natural environment. The pristine nature of that environment is our building block to the future. It must be protected to ensure our prosperity.

It's time to bid a not-so-fond farewell to this "grand experiment." We were promised sustainable, environmentally friendly finfish farming. Instead we've experienced harmful environmental and resource impacts, dead and diseased fish, taxpayer bailouts and oh, by the way — very few jobs. It's high time to cut your losses, which have now become our losses.

They say it takes a big man to admit his mistakes, and a smart man to correct them. How about that role for you, Mr. Minister? Is it a natural fit?

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