

N.S. salmon farm renewal stirs up neighbours



Kelly Cove Salmon Ltd. has applied for a renewal of its approval to operate a salmon and trout farm in Shelburne Harbour. Some local residents oppose the move.

A renewed aquaculture lease for Kelly Cove Salmon in Shelburne Harbour is raising local ire before the first fish is in the water.

The Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture has set an August 19 deadline for public comment on lease 0602, a 10-year licence and 20-year lease for a 20-hectare suspended cage cultivation of Atlantic salmon and rainbow trout.

Shelly Hipson lives in the nearby village of Atlantic and she has a laundry list of objections to the Sandy Point site, including the size of the 0602 farm.

“The site they want is a huge increase,” Hipson said.

Cooke Aquaculture communications director Chuck Brown there is no new activity being undertaken with the Sandy Point renewal, which renews an existing licence and lease.

In 2012, some Shelburne residents’ objections to the size and location of the Kelly Cove Salmon operation under the renewed licence were turned down by the Nova Scotia Supreme Court.

Justice Michael Wood dismissed then-residents Marian and Herschel Specter’s appeal of a decision that allowed the fish farm to be larger and closer to their property than first announced, based on a decision by Sterling Belliveau, then provincial minister of fisheries and aquaculture, to allow changes to three aquaculture licences.

Wood wrote that aquaculture sites had already operated in Shelburne Harbour for years and the operator proposed to move to adjacent sites within the harbour to alleviate environmental problems that had developed.

“There were to be some operational changes which would assist in minimizing any negative environmental impacts,” Wood wrote.

In his 32-page decision, the judge noted Kelly Cove’s applications were subject to review by Transport Canada, including an environmental assessment.

“Kelly’s Cove provided extensive technical reports to assist the minister in assessing the applications,” Wood wrote.

The closest of the three aquaculture sites was moved to within about 240 metres of the Specter property, Wood noted.

“Members of the public were aware of the proposed amendments and made submissions to (Belliveau and his department),” said the judge.

“Some were in favour of the relocation and some were not. The minister consulted with a number of government departments and agencies, none of whom expressed any concerns with respect to the applications.”

Hipson cites concerns for the local lobster industry, and a February 2014 letter to the province from the Conservation Council of New Brunswick that found part of the harbour floor in the area was essentially dead.

“The results indicate that, two years after the fish farm ceased production, the chemical and biological environment in the vicinity of the former Sandy Point fish farm still does not meet N.S. DFA’s environmental quality monitoring goals for marine aquaculture relative to a reference site one kilometer away,” wrote study author Inka Milewski in a letter to the provincial fisheries minister.

Milewski cited high levels of sulphides, copper and zinc found in bottom sludge at the site.

Hipson said the company, owned by New Brunswick-based Cooke Aquaculture, may have fallowed the site but that wasn’t enough.

“We’re killing the bottom,” she said.

“Where do we think that’s going, excrement from a million fish? If my septic was running out into the harbour I’d be charged,” Hipson said.

Cooke Aquaculture’s Brown said the company uses best practices such as crop rotation and fallowing, low stocking densities and use of underwater cameras for feeding help to minimize any potential impacts on the marine environment.

“The ocean floor under the site is monitored before stocking, during grow-out and after harvest to ensure the marine environment remains healthy and productive,” Brown said.

The CCNB raised concerns with the company's sites over treatment for sea lice after the New Brunswick-based company was fined over control issues on treatment conducted in New Brunswick.

That's not even an issue on the Shelburne Harbour sites, Brown said.

"We have never treated for sea lice in Shelburne Harbour."

Cooke was the centre of controversy when it abandoned plans to build a fish processing plant in Shelburne after receiving \$44 million from government for projects including the plant.

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