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Groups rally against ocean-based salmon farming in Nova Scotia

HALIFAX - Coastal communities in Nova Scotia are uniting to halt expansion plans for ocean-based salmon farms in the province.

More than 100 community groups and organizations will be in Halifax on Monday to protest the government's lack of public consultation prior to the release of a strategy that would see more open-net pen salmon farms erected across the province.

Open-net pen marine aquaculture involves fish that are grown in nets in the ocean, said Bruce Hancock, executive director of the Aquaculture Association of Nova Scotia.

Silver Donald Cameron, a journalist and writer of the upcoming documentary *Salmon Wars*, said coastal residents have serious concerns about the plans outlined in the strategy.

"The issue has kind of created its own little movement," said Cameron in Halifax on Sunday.

Cameron said the groups are not against aquaculture, but rather the government's plans to expand the \$50-million industry without having consulted the public.

Hancock said the strategy does not mean there is no room for discussions with the public.

"In no way is this strategy... considered consultation for new sites," said Hancock from Coldbrook, N.S. on Sunday. "Every new site that would be entertained in this province would have to go through the normal environmental assessment process, which includes consultation with the public."

"That's all this document is. It's how we move this industry forward."

Cameron said the province hasn't considered the possibly damaging environmental effects.

"We need to give it a serious look, get some expertise on this thing," said Cameron.

"That doesn't seem a lot to ask... to hold some meetings and get people's opinions and address the issues that they have."

There's a catalogue of problems that can arise from open-net pen farming, said Cameron.

He said the fish feces, along with dead fish and excess food, can pollute the surrounding sea water. He said dangerous and sometimes illegal pesticides are also used to tackle sea lice.

"It's a long, long list of problems... and they're caused by the fact that the farms are in the sea. If they were in closed containment on land, almost none of these things would occur."

But Hancock said farming in the water is no different than farming on land. He said the larger concentration of species you have in a given area, the more waste you'll have, no matter where the site is located.

He said farm operators monitor the sites for waste on a regular basis and have methods to reduce build up if needed.

"We've had open-net pen farming in Nova Scotia... for over 30 years," said Hancock. "There's no evidence that it's having a detrimental effect on the environment or other users of the marine environment."

The strategy, released by the Fisheries and Aquaculture Department last week, acknowledges there is public concern over aquaculture and promises to develop a communications plan by the end of 2013.

Monday's event is expected to draw several hundred people from a variety of sectors including fisheries, tourism and environmental science, the Ecology Action Centre said.

The province's Aquaculture and Fisheries Department did not immediately return requests for comment on Sunday.

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