



Jordan Bay fish farms approved by Feds

By Amy Woolvett

Cooke Aquaculture has jumped a big hurdle in its bid to establish two new fish farms in Jordan Bay.

Transport Canada announced last week that it has given its official blessing to the project.

“The farms have not yet been approved but one of the major steps are complete,” said Nell Halse, vice president of communications for Cooke Aquaculture.

Transport Canada issued a detailed 245 page environmental report outlining their decision.

The proposed sites will be in Jordan Bay. One on the eastern side of the mouth of the bay and the other site near Blue Island.

Kelly Cove plans to place the 500 by 800 metre sites 2.1 km apart and each to be stocked with 550,000 to 700,000 cultivated Atlantic salmon in their first cycle.

“The proponent has defined measures in its environmental impact assessment in an effort to avoid, reduce and eliminate impacts to waste quality, ocean sediment and composition,” stated the report.

The report detailed possible harms to the environment, health risks for humans, habitats of wildlife and the impact on the local fisheries but concluded that their research deemed the impact lacked any significant long-term effects.

They stated that while there were no specific regulations to manage toxic substances from marine finfish aquaculture Cooke officials say there are many plans to be implemented to minimize risk.

Cooke has designed a feeding monitoring system to reduce waste matter including feeding the fish by daylight using blowers and monitoring fish behaviour.

The report detailed how the farm was to operate in order to reduce risk to species including the piping plover.

“Beach cleanups will only take place during the fall and winter...vessels are to be kept at least 500 m from the beach,” stated the report. “Based on the review of information available on species at risk the potential for significant adverse environmental impact are not likely.”

The report also outlined the impact of human health including noise as well as odours produced from the decomposition of fish food, fish mortality, organic waste, fouled nets and blood water.

While they said that there was no expertise available to assist them in a resolution, measures will have to be taken to reduce these impacts.

All ill effects that could be produced by a fish farm including environmental, human and species adverse impacts were found to be insignificant as long as the proper guidelines were followed by the company.

“Mitigating these effects is the design, location and relatively small size of the farms in relation to its habitat,” the report read.

“Concerns are often raised about long-term changes that may occur not only as a result of a single action but the combined effects of each successive action to the environment,” it read. “But the cumulative effects are not significant.”

There have been groups of people loudly voicing opposition to open fish farms in Shelburne County including Mayday Shelburne County.

The report addressed concerns raised by various groups in the province but again deemed the long-term impact to be insignificant.

The impact on the local fisheries were also to be considered low.

In regards to the chemical use of PCB's (polychlorinated biphenyls) there are to be rigorous inspections by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency but are deemed no more harmful for human consumption than what is used in beef, chicken, pork and dairy by Canadian producers.

There has been a recent outbreak of Infectious Salmon Anemia that resulted in the culling of all of the penned salmon in the Shelburne Harbour sites.

“There have been confirmed outbreaks and there are to be a number of measures to reduce the exposure of the disease,” it stated.

They went on to explain that Cooke is required to respond to any outbreak with quick management and to immediately contact the CFIA.

The process of accepting the proposed sites by the federal government began in 2010.

The next step is to receive provincial approval.

Pam Davidson, a spokesperson with the provincial fisheries department said that they have not even started to look at approval on a provincial level.

“We have not received advice from Transport Canada on their review,” she said.

“Once we receive (their) advice and advice from other agencies, we will prepare our recommendations to the minister.”

While the overall message of the report claimed that the proposed fish farm sites were to have little impact they also detailed ways the company should handle any potential problems from chemical spills to outbreaks of disease.

“Although the likelihood of potential adverse environmental effects has been determined to not be significant; measures have been proposed as a precautionary approach.”

Halse does not know when or if they will receive final approval from the province.

“These sites are important to us and important to our overall plan,” she said.