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Province Rejects Second Salmon Farm - But Association for the Preservation of the Eastern Shore not Celebrating Yet

Interview with Marike Finlay, president of APES

BY ERICA BUTLER



Marike Finlay Holds Petition Against Open Pen Salmon Farming on the Eastern Shore. [Photo: Miles Howe]

HALIFAX — Residents of Shoal Bay are breathing a sigh of relief since the Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture (DFA) announced it would not grant a lease to Snow Island Salmon for an 18 hectare open pen salmon farm off their coast. A similar application for a salmon feedlot at nearby Spry Harbour is still pending.

"We were almost hopeless," says Marike Finlay, president of Association for the Preservation of the Eastern Shore (APES), a group formed to oppose open net pen operations at Shoal Bay and Spry Harbour. In the past two years, four new ocean-based salmon feedlot sites have been proposed and approved in other coastal Nova Scotia communities, despite community opposition. "Everybody said you've got to do what you do, but you've got to expect that [the lease] is going to be granted anyway," says Finlay.

Finlay had even less reason to think the Snow Island applications would be denied because midway through the environmental assessment process for Shoal Bay and Spry Harbour, the federal government drastically cut its responsibilities for environmental assessments, from thousands per year to less than 100. Since omnibus Bill C-38 passed in July 2012, no aquaculture projects anywhere in Canada will be assessed for environmental impacts by the federal government. And the Nova Scotia Department of Environment says it has **no plans to pick up the slack.**

Snow Island's applications started out before C-38, with Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) documents and community responses being filed with Transport Canada, the responsible agency for an assessment triggered under the former Navigable Waters Protection Act.

Transport Canada gave up its responsibilities for reviewing Snow Island's applications after C-38 passed, but the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) completed its science review. DFO consulted Snow Island's EIA documents and the community responses in their review. They submitted their findings to the Nova Scotia DFA in February, and for the first time, labeled a proposed aquaculture site as a "moderate risk" to endangered wild Atlantic salmon. It's that finding that DFA Minister Sterling Belliveau cited when he turned down Snow Island Salmon's application.

Finlay is pleased with the decision, but APES is holding off on formal celebrations until they hear about the second site under application. "We aren't making any presumptions," says Finlay. "We are keeping the pressure up until the decision is made public about Spry Harbour. We are expecting it will also be denied a license because the conditions are the same."

The looming question is what's different between Shoal Bay and the 4 other sites that have been approved by the DFA in the past two years, after undergoing the complete federal environmental assessment process, including advice from the federal DFO.

All sites lie within the same region designating wild Atlantic salmon an endangered species. However, DFO's Shoal Bay report refers to a May 2012 Recovery Potential Assessment conducted by DFO for the region's Atlantic salmon. This recovery potential assessment would not have been available when previous aquaculture sites were assessed.

"We had a lot of reasons going for us, but so did those other communities," says Finlay. She cites greater population density, APES' fundraising and multimedia campaign, and the fact that it's an election year as potential factors. "They've realized the campaign we've waged in the city is pretty strong and people are becoming aware of this," says Finlay. "I think they're kind of hoping to shut this issue down."

But Finlay says APES has no plans to slow down. "We stand as part of the Atlantic Coalition for Aquaculture Reform. We stand with those other communities - Port Mouton, St Mary's Bay, and Jordan Bay. And we believe that there are scientific reasons why those licenses shouldn't be granted either."

The Atlantic Coalition for Aquaculture Reform recently released a study using DFA's own data to show significant increases in polluted and grossly polluted test sites at open pen finfish farms in Nova Scotia since 2006. Study author Inka Milewski says that open pen farms are "degrading the

sea bottom and creating dead zones.” Despite these findings, the DFO's science review cited a "low risk" to fish habitat from the proposed Shoal Bay site.

It's still not clear how the federal cancellation of environmental assessments will affect future applications for open net pen farms. In the case of Shoal Bay, an EIA was filed and community responses were received and considered by DFO even though the formal EA process was cut short by Bill C-38. In future applications, there is no process in place for either an EIA or community input, although DFO has said it will provide advice to the province when requested.

*Please enjoy the full interview with Marike Finlay, which originally aired on **Habitat Radio on CKDU.***

<http://halifax.mediacoop.ca/audio/province-rejects-second-salmon-farm-association-pr/16806>