

PR war waged over fish farms

[By SELENA ROSS](#)

Nova Scotians fighting the growth of local fish farming get their information from sources like the David Suzuki Foundation, the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency and biologists' research.

They spread their findings through word of mouth, email and small websites. There's also a documentary about salmon farming, says Sandy Moser, a Sheet Harbour resident and co-director of the Association for Preservation of the Eastern Shore.

But Moser's loosely knit team is being out-gunned by the Aquaculture Association of Nova Scotia, which recently expanded an ad campaign extolling the virtues of various kinds of aquaculture, including open-pen fish farms.

The association is getting tens of thousands of tax dollars to help turn its Sea Farmers website into glossy mail-outs as well as newspaper and radio ads.

Greg Roach, an assistant deputy minister with Fisheries and Aquaculture, said Friday that building public confidence is a pillar of the province's aquaculture strategy. The association's campaign fits with the province's wish to inform the public, he said.

"There's a lot of misinformation out there or complete lack of information on fish farming in general," Roach said.

Fish-farming critics say the same, but in their view, it's the aquaculture industry — and now the government — that's spreading the misinformation.

"We've done so much research and we've found so much information and science around the world that states that there are a lot of health hazards and a lot of environmental hazards around the open-net fish farms," said Moser.

"We ask the government, 'Where is your science?' And they don't produce it," she said. "(Fisheries Minister Sterling) Belliveau says, 'We have science.' Well, I'd like to see it."

Moser, whose group belongs to the Atlantic Coalition for Aquaculture Reform, said the province's decision to spend money on industry ads rankles, especially since fish-farming skeptics have repeatedly asked for public funding to conduct research into the relatively new industry, she said.

The aquaculture association is made up of dozens of small local aquaculture businesses.

Its ad campaign is heavy on short biographies of Nova Scotians who work in aquaculture, including oyster and clam farming. Moser's coalition is not opposed to farming these types of seafood, she said.

The ads also include job numbers, 700 industry-wide across Nova Scotia, according to the association.

One section lists "10 myths" about aquaculture, most addressing concerns about fin fish.

"Farmed fish is a healthy source of essential nutrients and minerals and does not pose a health risk," the website reads. "Pesticides are only used in fish farming when absolutely necessary and must be prescribed by a veterinarian."

It is the economic aspects of the industry that Fisheries and Aquaculture spokeswoman Pam Davidson highlighted in an email Saturday.

"It's important for Nova Scotians to understand the aquaculture industry and the role it plays in building a strong economy, locally and provincially," she wrote.