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Salmon virus hits N.L. fish farm site

CONNEL RIVER, N.L. — Newfoundland and Labrador is dealing with its first outbreak of infectious salmon anemia at an aquaculture site.

Miranda Pryor, executive director of the province's aquaculture industry association, said they've detected the virus in the wild before, but Friday's news that it had hit an aquaculture site near Conne River was a first.

The virus is being contained to one site, but Pryor said 450,000 salmon at the Gray Aqua Group site will be destroyed as a result.

Pryor said the outbreak was first suspected two weeks ago, but the Canadian Food Inspection Agency only confirmed the virus on Friday.

A release says the tests are conclusive.

The CFIA said people don't need to worry about an effect on human health or food safety.

Guy Gravelle, senior media relations officer for the agency, said the risks the virus poses are to fish health and the economy.

The CFIA will oversee the destruction and disposal of the affected salmon and the cleaning and disinfection of the entire facility, he said.

Infectious salmon anemia is a naturally occurring virus that poses no risk to wild species such as lobster, cod and herring.

"We are taking this confirmed finding very seriously and are co-operating fully," Gray Aqua Group vice-president Clyde Collier said in a release.

Although the issue is new for Newfoundland aquaculture, it isn't the first time a company has been ordered to destroy salmon infected with the virus.

Earlier this year, a Nova Scotia fish farm was ordered to destroy hundreds of thousands of salmon after a similar outbreak outside Shelburne Harbour.

Outbreaks of infectious salmon anemia in New Brunswick in the late 1990s dealt a blow to the aquaculture industry there at the time and the federal government provided tens of millions of dollars in compensation.