

Salmon virus prompts concern in Nova Scotia

Andrew Rankin Special to the Star

Nova Scotia communities are voicing opposition to the province's growing aquaculture industry now that a salmon farm has been found to have a virus.

A Shelburne, N.S.-based salmon farm has destroyed tens of thousands of fish at its operations after routine testing detected suspected infectious salmon anemia on Feb. 10. A Canadian Food Inspection Agency investigation on Wednesday confirmed the results. The fish farm, which is owned by New Brunswick-based Cooke Aquaculture, remains in quarantine.

The fatal and highly contagious virus, which occurs naturally, causes severe anemia in fish. Though some show symptoms, others don't.

Citizens, local businesses and fishermen on the province's eastern shore formed a group called the Association for the Preservation of the Eastern Shore on Feb. 17 following news of the outbreak. Its aim is to stop another company, the Snow Island Salmon Inc., from opening three finfish salmon farms in Shoal Bay, Spry Bay and Beaver Harbour, which lie on the eastern shore. They call fish farms a threat to their livelihood and say the farms aren't healthy for the fish — or the local community.

In Queens County, a similar group called the Friends of Port Mouton Bay is pushing its municipality to ban farm fishing in its bay. The group claims it has proof a fish farm, which closed in 2009, polluted Port Mouton Bay with antibiotics and other contaminants.

Although Nova Scotia's aquaculture industry is still relatively small, it shows no signs of slowing down. The industry, which mainly generates salmon and trout, is a \$50 million business.

Peter Tyedmers, an associate professor at the School for Resource and Environmental Studies at Dalhousie University in Halifax, said the virus is serious. He pointed to a 2007 outbreak in Chile, which decimated the country's industry within days.

"Where the virus isn't contained it has disastrous consequences," Tyedmers said.

Greg Roach, Nova Scotia's deputy minister of fisheries and aquaculture, had said that if the CFIA results confirmed an outbreak, the department would work with the federal agency to remedy the problem.

Shelburne Mayor Al Delaney said he was concerned about the virus, but added that Cooke Aquaculture plans to expand its fish farming operations in the community.

Tyedmers said fish farming will be relied on more as the population grows. "I think well managed monitored aquaculture could expand in Nova Scotia," said Tyedmers.