

Nova Scotia APES Smell Something Fishy in Open Pen Approval Process

Association for the Preservation of the Eastern Shore heads to Halifax to protest open pen fin fish farming.

BY [MILES HOWE](#) . [Photos: Miles Howe]



APES at Legislature House, Halifax.



Marika Findley, president of APES, with petition.



APES gathered at Grand Parade Square.



K'ijipuktuk (Halifax) – The ongoing battle between groups opposed to open pen fin fish aquaculture in Nova Scotia and the provincial New Democratic Party took another turn on Friday, Dec. 7, as a group known as APES descended upon the Legislature House in Halifax.

APES, the Association for the Preservation of the Eastern Shore, are one of 116 organizations that have called for a moratorium on new licencing for open pen fin fishing operations in Nova Scotia.

Of particular concern to the Eastern Shore are the proposed open pen sites in Shoal Bay and Spry Bay. Both of these proposed sites, as well as a third proposed site for Beaver Harbour, which was recently withdrawn, have been put forward by Snow Island Salmon, the Canadian subsidiary of Scottish aquaculture giant Loch Duart Ltd.

In the case of the Eastern Shore, where lobster fishing, environmental preservation and wild salmon sport fishing interests intersect, residents have raised concern over the potential of farmed salmon sea lice infestations spreading to wild salmon populations.

There is also worry that potential fish-related wastes from the proposed farm sites will destroy bays and coastlines that continue to support viable wild commercial fishing, notably lobster, and provide habitat for a number of endangered and at-risk species.

Loch Duart and Snow Island have [presented their farming model](#), which involves proposed rotations and fallowing periods, as the low impact alternative to New Brunswick-based Cooke Aquaculture, where three CEOs remain up on numerous charges under the recently-gutted Fisheries Act.

Independent research, [such as that undertaken](#) by members of APES on a recent fact-finding mission to Scotland, presents a disturbingly different reality. Documents show that Loch Duart has experienced numerous, and ongoing, sea lice infestations, for which it has dumped a variety of chemicals into the Scottish coastline.

APES's vice president Bill Williams suggests that Snow Island's application process, in particular the baseline study that provides data on environmental conditions at the proposed farm sites, is wrought with inconsistencies, fudged data and irrelevant site comparisons, and is indicative of the lack of actual third party analysis on open pen fin fish farming available in Nova Scotia.

“It's a joke,” Williams told the Halifax Media Co-op. “The data is wrong. There was erroneous data in it. Data is missing from it. Data is 20 years old. And that's been brought up to the Fisheries minister's attention. We brought it up in the office.”

The baseline study in question was undertaken by Sweeney International Marine Corporation (SIMCorp). Robert Sweeney, owner and founder of SIMCorp, happens to be the secretary/treasurer of the Atlantic Canada Fish Farmers Association, an umbrella group that

counts among its goals to: “Ensure a secure business climate that provides the infrastructure necessary to support greater investment and profitability of the Atlantic Canadian farmed finfish sector.” This at least suggests some degree of conflict of interest.

The Sweeney study references wind and wave data from three sites: the LaHave Bank, a buoy in the gulf of Maine, and the Halifax Harbour, and from these readings makes the conclusion that the wind and wave conditions at the Shoal Bay and Spry Bay sites are acceptable for open pen sites.

This is problematic to Williams because the sites are all dozens — and in one case hundreds — of kilometres from Snow Island's proposed sites, and are located in significantly deeper water. To conclude that the Snow Island sites would be able to adequately flush out farm wastes based upon this data is erroneous, according to Williams. The data is also from 1991, which raises doubts as to whether it can even be safely extrapolated to 2012 weather conditions.

Also missing from the study are oxygen content, salinity and temperature of the water; three variables that, according to Williams, are integral to properly plotting fish growth.

The potential for Snow Island's sites to effect endangered species, especially birds over-wintering or on migratory patterns, is also problematic for Williams, and is another area he doesn't see properly addressed in Sweeney's study.

“The bird study for the complete area, for the 25 miles of the shore that these three sites are on, they took it from DNR [Department of Natural Resources] research,” says Williams. “They did a bird count, once a year, between February and March, when there's [nothing] out there. We did our own. We have people down there that belong to the Bird Society, some of them belong to the Nature Trust, and they do their own counts. They know what's there. I hunt and fish. I'm on the water continually. I wrote a list of the birds that I saw, and it was ten times longer than theirs.”

As of press time, no one from SIMCorp had responded to a request for comment.

When asked about the potential of missing and irrelevant data in the Sweeney study, Marshall Giles, director of aquaculture for the Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture, in an email to the HMC, noted that:

“Sweeney[s] ... baseline study is only one part of a rigorous review and the application process which can take up to three years to complete. We network with the following federal agencies: Transport Canada (Navigable Waters Protection Program), Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Environment Canada, and Canadian Food Inspection Agency as part of the evaluation process for applications.”

New Democrat MLA Jim Boudreau, who many in attendance at the Dec. 7 rally perceived to be a Snow Island facilitator in this matter, rather than a representative his constituents' desires, was quick to dismiss the provincial government's role in the matter.

"The problem with a number of these people is that they create their own version of reality," Boudreau told the HMC. "I'm very annoyed at the misrepresentations that some of these individuals make ... One of the things that quite frankly annoys me is that there seems to be all guns pointed towards the NDP government, whereas any approvals for any sites in the province of Nova Scotia are the responsibility of the federal government. This is not the NDP government. We do not approve these sites. We basically licence them after they are approved by the federal government. So there's no emphasis on the federal Tories. There's no talk about Peter MacKay. There's just talk about the NDP and Jim Boudreau. This is a process that's before the federal government. Jim Boudreau has no say over that."

Williams recounts that Boudreau has approached many members of APES, encouraging them to ease off of Snow Island's Spry Bay and Shoal Bay sites, and that in return Snow Island would drop the Beaver Harbour site from its proposal. While Boudreau doesn't deny attempting to set up meetings between APES and Snow Island, he has a different take on his motivations for doing so.

"Basically as the MLA I've been trying to set up meetings between people, and I did do that, and some of the meetings were productive," said Boudreau. "But for the most part meetings – even when they were requested and they were set up – there was an attempt, by a number of their leadership, to sort of bully some of the individuals to not attend the meetings."

Boudreau also believes that APES's concerns vis-a-vis aquaculture on the Eastern Shore are related to a fear of an antiquated "industrial" aquaculture model that is not at all similar to Snow Island's proposed farms.

"The model that's being proposed on the Eastern Shore is quite different from the model that the leadership is purporting it to be," said Boudreau. "It's a totally different model with lower stocking densities, with greater distances between farms, no pesticides ... and a complete fallowing period, and a complete removal of the gear during the fallowing period. So the problem that's happening is basically that apples are being compared to oranges."

Boudreau's constituents, however, appear to be speaking with a rather unified voice in opposition to open pen fin fishing. Marike Findley, president of APES, brought a petition to Legislature House signed by over 90 per cent of the residents of Murphy's Cove, Pleasant Harbour and Shoal Bay, in which the residents declare that they want Shoal Bay and its approaches to be a open pen fin fish farming-free zone. Boudreau noted in an interview that he had not yet seen the petition.

"When the industry drives by these bays, and sees that 90 per cent of people have signed a petition, and put up these signs that say 'Spry Bay bans open pen fin fishing in their bays. Shoal Bay bans open pen fin fishing in their bays.' The industry people driving around are going to say 'This is going to be awful hard to set up in here.'" says Findley.