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Editorial: Secrecy not an option on fish farm compensation



[Greg Bennett](#)

What's the big secret?

Last year, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency gave out \$13-million in compensation to Cooke Aquaculture when it was forced to kill salmon from its Shelburne fish farms.

The outbreak of infectious salmon anemia spread amongst the pens in 2012. The outbreak of the untreatable fish disease led to the culling of three salmon cages totaling around one million salmon.

At the time, the federal government would not reveal the exact amount of compensation given out.

It took a Freedom of Information request from the CBC to reveal that Cooke Aquaculture was compensated \$13-million for its losses.

The money recouped a portion of the company's losses through "an established program available to all farmers" noted company officials.

Our problem isn't necessarily with the fact that Cooke Aquaculture was compensated for its losses or even with the amount involved –you can argue that the farming compensation program does apply here. And the company says the federal compensation package only partially covered its losses.

The company also argues that they continue to grow, harvest and market fish from Nova Scotia and are continuing to work on its expansion plans.

And while we're not entirely sure you can compare growing fish to raising cattle or chickens, we'll leave that philosophical argument for a later day.

Our main problem is largely with the fact the government is not readily willing to share the amounts given out in compensation.

It's our money dammit. We may not have any real say on how it's spent but we should at least be told where it's going.

Cooke's received the \$13-million in two installments in 2012 but it wasn't until almost two years later after filing for the information through the Freedom of Information Act that that number became public.

We understand that there is controversy surrounding open pen fish farms in Nova Scotia ...but this isn't about aquaculture.

If it was a chicken farmer or a strawberry farmer involved here, we'd still want to know the amounts handed out.

We think the public deserves that information too, without having to resort to freedom of information requests to get it.

Private companies might like to keep their finances private but when it comes to government funds, secrecy should not an option.

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