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CBC News

Quarantined N.S. salmon sent to N.B. processor



There has been a heavy presence of CFIA inspectors at the Black's Harbour plant and also during the transfer process. (Connell Smith/CBC)

Salmon from a quarantined Nova Scotia aquaculture farm are now being moved to a fish plant in Blacks Harbour, N.B. for processing.

Cooke Aquaculture is the first company to process fish with infectious salmon anemia (ISA) under a new set of rules set by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

According to the CFIA, ISA poses no threat to humans and are safe to consume.

About 240,000 salmon from Cooke Aquaculture's quarantined Coffin Island Farm near Liverpool, N.S. will be transported by tanker truck to New Brunswick in the coming weeks. The first shipments of fish were sent last week.

There is no treatment for ISA, which is fatal to fish and easily spreads throughout a population. The CFIA has taken steps to prevent contamination.

There has been a heavy presence of CFIA inspectors at stages throughout the transfer process and also at the Black's Harbour plant. Plant employees have had to wear special suits to avoid spreading contamination.

Nell Halse, a spokesperson for Cooke Aquaculture, said it's a big job.

"The plant has to be completely disinfected," said Halse. "The employees have to change gear and then the ISA fish are brought in and again — this is nothing to do with human health, the fish are perfectly safe to eat."

In fact, Halse said, the company is obligated to process and market the fish if possible because the government has to compensate salmon growers for fish that are culled because of disease.

Cooke has classifications under which the fish can be marketed.

Janice Harvey, who has been a critic of the industry since 1990, said disease is a byproduct of industrialized fish growing.

"If it's going to continue, then you're going to expect to have diseases and you're going to have to deal with diseased fish," she said.

An outbreak of ISA at a Cooke facility in Shelburne in February resulted in the company destroying 700,000 fish.