

Open Net Pen versus Progressive Aquaculture



Shoreline contamination in Jordan Bay. Is a nearby open-net pen salmon farm responsible? [Photo: Salmon Wars]

By Stewart Lamont

The issue of open net pen aquaculture has been raging on the airwaves and in coastal communities for years . There are those that favour it (the previous Dexter Government most notably – they were prepared to promote it and subsidize it to the tune of multiple millions), and there are those that are vehemently opposed.

Many Nova Scotians are now asking themselves: The Government has changed, but has anything else ?

Quite frankly, it is a work in progress.

The current folks have been suspiciously quiet. They say they are waiting for the results of the Regulatory Review Panel, but that report is not due for another 12-18 months. Meanwhile Rome is burning, and precisely who is paying attention?

That may be a question for our new Premier.

He is all too familiar with this issue, and he may not be quite as anxious to compensate disease, waste and failure as was Mr Dexter.

But we'll let him answer on that one himself ...

In the meanwhile, if you repeat something over and over again, does that mean it is true? The feedlot community likes to say to anybody who will listen that on-land, closed containment, business models don't work.

Too costly is the party line!

Clearly the Government have bought this fibbery, because they now repeat it themselves. Apparently we have to use the oceans as our septic in order to give open net pen aquaculture operators a fighting chance.

Poor fellas. God help us they have their talking points. And they repeat them over and over and over again...

But there are companies and individuals throughout Atlantic Canada which say this is just toxic baloney. Better yet, they have embraced the challenge and they are doing things differently.

Responsible individuals from any walk of life quickly discover that open net pen aquaculture is simply not sustainable.

The feed conversion rate is disgraceful, the pollution from a typical mega fish farm in a typical production cycle is monstrous, the risk of escapes from the pens is frightening, the usage of pesticides to treat lice conditions is unconscionable, the willingness of business and government to feed ISA infected sick fish to an unsuspecting public is borderline criminal.

Should we go on with the threats and the risks associated with this business model?

Will the conspiracy of silence last forever?

Will someone in government actually speak out and acknowledge there is indeed a better way?

Did the change of government on October 8th alter anything whatsoever on this issue?

These questions are all timely food for thought.

Clearly we have to look at the alternatives. On-land, closed-containment, progressive aquaculture changes the dynamic overnight. Consumers could still have their salmon and their trout. Companies could still be in the business of selling protein, only these versions would be sustainable. Coastal communities could obtain the employment benefits from an active aquaculture sector. Governments would get tax revenues from the activity created.

But all of a sudden we would be smarter and wiser and embrace the 21st century technologies.

When will we acknowledge that open-net pen is yesterday's bad news?

Mr Premier?

The ball is in your court...

Stewart Lamont is managing director of Tangier Lobster.

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