

February 8, 2012

From: <http://responsibleaquaculture.wordpress.com/2012/02/08/nafta-panel-asked-to-investigate-canadian-violation-of-wildlife-law/>

## NAFTA Panel Asked to Investigate Canadian Violation of Wildlife Law

### Petition Seeks International Investigation of Canada's Farmed Fish Operations, Protections for Wild Salmon

SAN FRANCISCO— Conservation, fishing and native groups in Canada and the United States filed a formal [petition](#) today requesting an international investigation into Canada's failure to protect wild salmon in British Columbia from disease and parasites in [industrial fish feedlots](#). The petition was submitted to the Commission for Environmental Cooperation under the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation — an environmental side agreement to the North American Free Trade Agreement — and seeks enforcement of Canada's Fisheries Act.

"The Canadian inquiry into the collapse of Fraser River sockeye, the largest salmon-producing river in the world, suggests the primarily Norwegian-owned British Columbia salmon-farming industry exerts trade pressures that exceed Canada's political will to protect wild salmon," said biologist Alexandra Morton with the Pacific Coast Wild Salmon Society. "Releasing viruses into native ecosystems is an irrevocable threat to biodiversity, yet Canada seems to have no mechanism to prevent salmon-farm diseases from afflicting wild salmon throughout the entire North Pacific."

Canada has permitted more than 100 industrial salmon feedlots in British Columbia to operate along wild salmon migration routes, exposing ecologically and economically valuable salmon runs to epidemics of disease, parasites, toxic chemicals and concentrated waste. The petition documents Canada's failure to enforce the Fisheries Act in allowing industrial aquaculture to erode the capacity of ecosystems to support wild salmon. The proliferation of salmon feedlots is linked to dramatic declines in British Columbia's wild salmon populations and the detection of a lethal salmon virus.

"Fish farms in Canada are an unholy marriage between various levels of the Canadian governments and foreign-owned companies," said Chief Bob Chamberlain of the Kwikwasu'tinuxw Haxwa'mis First Nation. "We continue to explore, identify and act upon whatever means possible to rid our traditional territories of open net cage fish farms."

"The Canadian government's disregard for wild salmon stocks in pandering to multinational salmon farming corporations is outrageous," said Zeke Grader, director of the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations. "Salmon feedlots put wild salmon, the communities that depend upon them, a billion-dollar fishing industry, tens of thousands of fishing jobs, and our nations' shared natural heritage at risk of extinction."

“Industrial salmon feedlots function as disease-breeding factories, allowing parasites and diseases to reproduce at unnaturally high rates,” said Jeff Miller with the Center for Biological Diversity. “Marine feedlot waste flows directly, untreated, into contact with wild salmon. Putting feedlots hosting a toxic soup of bacteria, parasites, viruses and sea lice on wild fish migration routes is the height of biological insanity.”

When a country signatory to NAFTA fails to enforce its environmental laws, any party may petition for enforcement. Canada’s Fisheries Act prohibits harmful alteration, disruption or destruction of fish habitat or addition of “deleterious substances.” The petitioners seek an investigation and finding by the Commission for Environmental Cooperation that Canada is violating its Fisheries Act with regard to industrial aquaculture. Such a finding could lead to international action to force Canada to protect wild salmon, ideally by relocating fish aquaculture into contained tanks on land.

“Applying the Fisheries Act to fish feedlots as it is applied to all other marine users and removing feedlots from salmon migration routes will benefit wild fish and the economy of British Columbia,” said Miller. “Moving to contained aquaculture on land will benefit areas starved for employment and clean up the rivers to restore wild salmon runs.”

Scientific evidence of harm to wild salmon swimming through B.C. waters from fish feedlots has been mounting, as has public concern that feedlots could spread epidemic diseases. This is a threat that jeopardizes the health of every wild salmon run along the Pacific Coast, since U.S. and Canadian stocks mingle in the ocean and estuaries.

The Canadian petitioners are the Pacific Coast Wild Salmon Society in B.C. and Kwikwasu’tinuxw Haxwa’mis First Nation, a native tribe whose territory off northern Vancouver Island is being used by 27 Norwegian-owned salmon feedlots. The U.S. petitioners are the Center for Biological Diversity and Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen’s Associations, the largest trade association of commercial fishers on the west coast, representing family fishing men and women. The University of Denver Environmental Law Clinic helped prepare and submit the petition.