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Salmon farm plan withdrawn on Eastern Shore



A Scotland-based company has withdrawn one of its three applications to develop salmon fish farms on Nova Scotia's Eastern Shore.

Snow Island Salmon Inc. — the Canadian subsidiary of Scottish aquaculture company Loch Duart Ltd. — wanted to operate salmon farms at Shoal Bay, Spry Harbour and Beaver Harbour.

The application for Beaver Harbour was withdrawn by the company because of its proximity to wild salmon populations.

"Snow Island, in conjunction with government, conservation groups and the scientific community, is working to further understand wild salmon migration routes along the Eastern Shore," Shane Borthwick, the vice-president of operations for Snow Island Salmon Inc., said in a statement.

"Snow Island will continue to work with local communities, regulators and stakeholders to establish a responsible, world class salmon farming model that will bring new economic opportunities to rural Nova Scotia."

Sterling Belliveau, the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture, said Friday he doesn't see the withdrawal as a win for opponents of fish farming.

"That issue about the migration of wild salmon on that river system, the West River, that was an issue of discussion," said Belliveau.

"I think that the company made that decision based on the information that the residents and salmon anglers have brought to their attention."

Belliveau said people need to put fish farming in perspective.

"You can put all the existing open salmon pens that exist now and you can put them into one tenth of Bedford Basin," he said.

"I really believe, with my background as a fisherman, knowing that that's a very small footprint."

Belliveau said he's convinced fish farming can be done safely and bring jobs to rural communities.

Snow Island Salmon Inc. said it's standing behind its two remaining applications for fish farms in Shoal Bay and Spry Harbour. Those applications are currently in the review stage.

B.C. salmon report to be studied

Meanwhile, Belliveau said his staff would be reviewing a lengthy report released by a B.C. Supreme Court justice earlier this week, which recommends a cap on farmed salmon in British Columbia's Discovery Islands.

In a three-volume report on the future of the sockeye fishery, the judge recommended a freeze on new open-net salmon farm production in the Discovery Islands until September 2020.

"We are listening to all the information that's being collected by aquaculture and we make the right decisions based on good science," said Belliveau.

But Liberal fisheries critic Michel Samson said that doesn't go far enough.

"We have said as a Liberal caucus here in Nova Scotia that we'd like to see no new sites approved in Nova Scotia until we have a comprehensive review of the regulations which are currently in place," he said.