

Don't sacrifice tourism for more fish farms, groups say

By [BRUCE ERSKINE](#) Business Reporter



A sea-kayaker plies the waters at Lawrencetown Beach last July. Some groups are worried what more open-pen salmon farms will do to Nova Scotia's tourism industry. (ADRIEN VECZAN / Staff / File)

More than 50 groups and organizations are calling for a provincial moratorium on open-pen salmon aquaculture.

“We’re selling our coastline,” Judith Cabrita, a director of Destination Eastern and Northumberland Shores, said Monday in an interview.

The organization represents private tourism operators in Antigonish, Guysborough and Pictou counties, as well as ones in eastern Halifax Regional Municipality.

It is one of 51 groups that called on the provincial government Monday to halt the expansion of open-pen salmon farms.

“I hope the government will realize there is a future in recreational fishing and an economically sustainable, contained farmed fishery,” said Cabrita, former executive director of the Tourism Industry Association of Nova Scotia.

“Our sustainable, natural product is a huge part of our tourism product. We have to protect what we have.”

In the past, the government has said contained fish farms, which don’t interact with the natural marine environment, aren’t commercially viable.

But Cabrita said there is more economic benefit to be derived from tourism than from open-pen salmon farms.

“Tourism and recreational fishing produce more jobs.”

A single recreational salmon caught in Nova Scotia is worth about \$2,500 in related revenues, she said.

That position was underscored in a letter to Fisheries and Aquaculture Minister Sterling Belliveau last month from tourism association president Darlene Grant Fiander.

The expansion of open-pen salmon farms in Nova Scotia could hurt the province’s reputation as a natural tourism destination, Grant Fiander said.

“A healthy natural environment is one of the principal star attractions for tourism.”

Grant Fiander asked the minister for an independent environmental assessment that also considered the tourism and recreation implications of recent applications by Snow Island Salmon, a subsidiary of Scotland’s Loch Duart, to develop salmon farms in Spry Harbour, Shoal Bay and Beaver Harbour on the Eastern Shore.

“Tourism is a \$1.8-billion industry in Nova Scotia, providing nearly 40,000 jobs and contributing over \$225 million in federal, provincial and municipal taxes,” Grant Fiander said.

The Atlantic Salmon Federation is also calling for an open-pen moratorium.

“I would like to think the government would listen,” Lewis Hinks, the association’s provincial program director, said in an interview.

Hinks said open-pen farming has “potentially significant” environmental and economic consequences for tourism, commercial fisheries, coastal water quality and rebuilding wild Atlantic salmon populations.

“We’re not looking to end aquaculture, but to develop it in a way that is progressive. There’s an opportunity here. Nova Scotia is at a crossroads.”

Opposition to salmon farms in Nova Scotia has grown since Cooke Aquaculture of New Brunswick announced ambitious expansion plans last year.

Since then, Cooke has been charged with using illegal pesticides in New Brunswick farms and has had to euthanize farmed salmon in Shelburne found to have infectious salmon anemia.

In a statement Monday, Belliveau said the province is “committed to growing aquaculture into an economically, environmentally and socially sustainable industry.”

The department uses information gathered at open houses and public meetings as part of its application review process, he said.

Belliveau reiterated his position that infectious salmon anemia, while serious, can be contained and eliminated with appropriate farming practices and the containment and destruction of infected fish.

“Before making decisions on whether to approve or reject applications for new aquaculture leases and licences, I weigh information from a variety of federal and provincial departments and agencies. This (virus) finding will be one of many factors I weigh.”

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