

For Immediate Release:
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Participants in sockeye Judicial Inquiry demanding salmon farm companies release critical disease, sea lice and stocking information

VANCOUVER, BC — Two participant groups in the Judicial Inquiry into the decline of Fraser River sockeye — the Conservation and Aquaculture Coalitions — are pressing for critical fish health and stocking records from the salmon farming industry, the Province of B.C. and the Federal Government. The groups maintain that the data are needed by the Inquiry in order for it to properly fulfill its mandate and without them, no one can assess whether salmon farms have harmed Fraser sockeye. In response, the salmon farm representatives have objected to full disclosure of the requested information. All implicated parties are addressing their reservations about data disclosure in a hearing before the Commission in Vancouver today.

While some basic fish health data are publicly available, their utility is extremely limited from a scientific standpoint and do not fully inform the public about the negative effects of open net pen farms on B.C.'s wild salmon.

All requested site-by-site fish health and stocking information is required for scientists to fully assess the impact salmon farms have on wild salmon. Without a full examination of all this information, the Inquiry may miss a significant piece of the Fraser sockeye puzzle.

“This information is critical to understanding wild salmon health in B.C.,” said Tim Leadem, Ecojustice staff lawyer. “The inquiry’s task is to find out why wild salmon numbers are fluctuating so dramatically, but unless the salmon farm industry makes the data accessible, we’re all just scrambling for answers in the dark.”

“Disease pathogens and sea lice can travel long distances in the ocean and have the potential to infect migrating wild salmon. We need an extensive release of data from the majority of farms in BC to fully understand the role salmon farms may be playing in the decline of Fraser sockeye.” states Stan Proboszcz of Watershed Watch Salmon Society, a group member of the Coastal Alliance for Aquaculture Reform.

“We all know why people keep secrets and this is unethical. Salmon farmers put themselves in public waters on a collision course with the Fraser sockeye which brought the BC economy \$250 million wholesale this year,” states Alexandra Morton, “secrecy is not an option. If they can’t tell us what they have released into public waters, we should be very concerned, they are destroying public confidence.”

Some are suggesting the success of the 2010 sockeye return implies we don’t need the Judicial Inquiry, but until we know what was different for the 2009 vs. the 2010 runs we can’t know if the problem has been solved or not. Norwegian salmon farm CEO, Geir

Isaksen (Cermaq/Mainstream), published a letter in Norway's leading finance paper, *Dagens Næringsliv* (September 18) saying the good sockeye run suggests salmon farms are not the main problem.

This year's strong Fraser sockeye return has only added to the uncertainty around the predictability and sustainability of Fraser sockeye populations. Fraser sockeye productivity has been in decline for more than a decade and the Inquiry needs to fully examine the possible contributions of farm-amplified disease and sea lice on the public's wild sockeye. If all the data are not fully released, the public will end up paying the full cost of the Inquiry without getting the answers they deserve.

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Note to editors: The hearing will take place today, September 22, 2010 at 10 am until 12:30pm at the at Courtroom 801, Federal Court, 701 West Georgia St, Vancouver

Conservation Coalition: Watershed Watch Salmon Society, Coastal Alliance for Aquaculture Reform, Fraser River Keeper Society, Georgia Strait Alliance, Otto Langer, David Suzuki Foundation and Raincoast Conservation Foundation

Aquaculture Coalition: Alexandra Morton, Raincoast Research Society, Pacific Coast Wild Salmon Society