The backbone of life on the coast is threatened by PRV

In Alaska—where open-net pen salmon farms have never been permitted—salmon harvests are some of the largest on record this year.

Meanwhile, just over the border in BC, wild salmon numbers are crashing. Shocking images of emaciated grizzly bears are making waves in international news media. Bears depend on wild salmon to fatten up for winter.

Yellow-tinged wild salmon are showing up across the BC coast. Pacific salmon infected with the Piscine orthoreovirus (PRV) are known to turn yellow, and PRV is widespread in farmed salmon.

On October 4th, during the federal election when there was no sitting Minister of Fisheries, the Department of Fisheries (DFO) made a decision around testing for PRV in response to two court rulings to revise their PRV policy. The Department of Fisheries is deeply divided on the issue of PRV. Some of their scientists believe that PRV is endemic to BC, and harmless. Others at DFO can see the evidence that PRV is from the Atlantic Ocean, and has now become ubiquitous in BC salmon farms.

There are two important reasons why we should not allow PRV-infected salmon into BC open-net pens:

1) crowded salmon farms amplify viruses and broadcast them to the surrounding environment;

2) salmon farms allow the virus to breed, mutate, and become more virulent—as happened in Norway.

Wild salmon are in crisis in British Columbia, and it is past time for all levels of government to act. In Canada, three of the four major political parties are calling for salmon farms to be removed from coastal waters. The charge was led by the federal New Democrat Party (NDP), followed by the Green Party and the federal Liberal Party. During the recent federal election, the Liberal Party promised “to develop a responsible plan to transition from open-net pen salmon farming in coastal waters to closed containment systems by 2025.”

With two major sea lice epidemics in Clayoquot Sound in the last two years, time is running out for wild salmon. Pesticide use, uncontrollable sea lice numbers, and viral outbreaks are a fatal brew which wild salmon clearly will not survive.

In 2018 the state of Washington, immediately to the south of BC, banned open-net pen salmon farms from their waters by 2025. In the interim period, they are not allowing salmon infected with PRV to be put into the water. They have ordered that 1.8 million farm fish be destroyed rather than put their wild salmon at risk...

As we go to press almost every farm has been tested. Full report available soon.

Photo: Sea Shepherd