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To: Richards, Laura <Laura.Richards@dfo-mpo.gc.ca>
Subject: Sea lice speech
Attach: Sea Lice.lawedits.doc

Laura - See in red some other questions. I am more concerned about this speech than others as it seems to be a little more speculative.

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Thanks,
Allison

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Speaking Notes

for

A Member of Parliament

**For a debate on
Low returns of sockeye salmon to the Fraser River**

**House of Commons
October ??, 2009**

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr. Speaker,

There has been much speculation in recent weeks on what may have caused the low returns of sockeye salmon to the Fraser River in 2009.

Some individuals and organizations have pinned the blame on the aquaculture industry, based on their belief that sea lice from salmon farms are causing sockeye mortality.

This attribution of blame and this belief are simply not valid.

The aquaculture industry of British Columbia is well regulated.

Strict provisions are in place to minimize the transfer of sea lice from farmed to wild salmon, to manage waste, and to prevent the escape of farmed Atlantic salmon into the ocean.

There is considerable scientific evidence that the measures and regulations in place are working, most notably the fact that pink salmon returns to the Fraser River numbered more than 19 million fish this year, and returns of pink salmon have been strong to rivers up and down the B.C. coast including those in areas where there are salmon farms such as the Broughton Archipelago.

Conversely, in 2008 returns of wild pink salmon were lower than expected coast wide, regardless of whether these stocks came into contact with fish farms and farmed fish as juveniles [not sure this adds anything and may, in fact, be confusing]

Mr. Speaker,

It is possible to state almost unequivocally, based on laboratory research conducted by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the monitoring programs that are in place,

that sea lice from fish farms did not cause any mortality in the pink salmon returning to B.C. rivers this year. [Laura Richards to review, particularly the use of the word “unequivocally”]

Under the regulatory framework for the British Columbia aquaculture industry, fish farm operators are required to monitor the level of sea lice on their salmon farms and report it to provincial authorities. This is a key measure in the province’s Fish Health Management Plan.

Should this monitoring indicate that sea lice levels are equal to or greater than three motile sea lice per farmed salmon, fish farm operators are required to take prompt action to reduce those levels.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, even though the limit for sea lice levels has been set very low as a precautionary measure, fish farm operators are taking additional measures such as fallowing farm sites during the out migration of pink salmon and treating farmed salmon with therapeutic agents to kill sea lice in advance of the out migration period.

Farm operators are acting responsibly to conserve and protect wild salmon populations.

Mr. Speaker,

The Government of Canada supports the development of a sustainable aquaculture industry in British Columbia.

By sustainable, we mean an aquaculture industry in which the potential risk to wild salmon stocks from interactions with fish farms or farmed salmon is understood and minimized.

We also mean an aquaculture industry that is innovative and environmentally conscious.

This is why the Government of Canada has invested \$23.5 million over five years as part of the Aquaculture Innovation and Market Access Program to help establish a vibrant and sustainable Canadian aquaculture industry that contributes to the economies of rural, coastal and First Nations communities.

Specifically, this program will help to improve the competitiveness of the Canadian aquaculture industry by encouraging an aquaculture sector that continuously develops and adopts innovative technologies and management techniques to enhance its global competitiveness and environmental performance.

And it will help to position Canadian aquaculture products as having high value in the market place based on their environmental performance, traceability and other considerations.

As part of this initiative, the Government of Canada is supporting research into the development and testing of closed-containment technologies.

Mr. Speaker,

I have noted that it is possible to state almost unequivocally that sea lice from fish farms did not lead to mortality in the pink salmon returning to the Fraser River this year.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans has studied sea lice found on juvenile pink and chum salmon in British Columbia's Broughton Archipelago since 2003.

DFO has also conducted laboratory research to determine when juvenile pink salmon are at most risk from sea lice.

Those studies found that only very small juvenile pink salmon – of less than 0.7 grams – experience mortality as a result of exposure to high levels of sea lice. When wild juvenile pink salmon enter the ocean, they are typically X grams. [Laura – can you help here?]

Furthermore, DFO research and monitoring has found that the risk of sea-lice induced mortality in juvenile pink salmon in the Broughton Archipelago in 2008 and 2009 was zero per cent.

In 2007, the year when the pink salmon that returned to the Fraser this year migrated into the Broughton as juveniles, the risk that they would be exposed to lethal levels of sea lice was just 0.4 per cent.

These scientific findings are confirmed by the high numbers of pink salmon that returned to the Fraser and other B.C. rivers in 2009.

Mr. Speaker,

We cannot say beyond a shadow of a doubt that sea lice from fish farms did not have some impact on Fraser River sockeye returns this year.

But we can infer from the science and monitoring work that DFO has done with pink and chum salmon that this risk would have been minimal.

And we can further infer from other scientific research conducted by the Department that other factors in the marine environment were much more likely to have caused the low returns of sockeye to the Fraser in 2009.

Mr. Speaker,

This conclusion is supported by the fact that a number of Fraser River sockeye runs, notably the Harrison run, were stronger than expected this year despite migrating past fish farms during the saltwater phase of their lifecycle, and that returns to the Skeena River, whose fish do not migrate past fish farms during their lifetimes, were much lower than anticipated.

Sea lice from fish farms may have contributed in some small way to the low returns of sockeye to the Fraser River, but they are clearly not the main factor that is affecting the marine survival of sockeye.

Mr. Speaker,

The Government of Canada is committed to identifying and evaluating the factors that are contributing to the poor marine survival of sockeye. We are equally committed to focusing resources on rebuilding Fraser River sockeye, and to undertaking scientific research that will support this, as well as to working with partners to achieve this worthwhile goal.

As an example, Mr. Speaker, the Department is developing methodologies that would make it possible to trace marked sea lice from fish farms to wild salmon, and thereby distinguish them from the naturally occurring sea lice found on these fish.

Mr. Speaker,

Whatever the causes, the low returns of sockeye to the Fraser River in 2009 are concerning.

This government is committed to investigating those causes, and to acting responsibly, based on the best science available, to rebuild sockeye salmon stocks on behalf of Canadians.

Thank you Mr. Speaker.