

WHAT DOES ALEXANDRA MORTON HAVE TO DO TO PROVE HER CASE AGAINST FISH FARMS?

By Rafe Mair
March 2, 2010

The plain fact is that Alexandra Morton shouldn't have to prove a damned thing. By international law we're bound by the Precautionary Principle, meaning that those who would invade the environment must demonstrate beyond a reasonable doubt that they can do so safely. To put it bluntly, industry has done absolutely nothing to meet the onus of the Precautionary Principle.

All the fish farmers have proved is that they've contributed to Campbell's party and all the Campbell government has proved is that they got the message loud and clear. The Campbell government, when it comes to the environment, doesn't give a damn what it does or says as long as the money's there.

Since Alex blew the whistle nearly a decade ago every independent fisheries scientist has confirmed that sea lice from fish farms were wiping out migrating wild salmon smolts. Every peer reviewed paper confirms Alex's findings all of which were also peer reviewed.



Campbell Knew All Along

Campbell, who makes Pinocchio a minor leaguer, has consistently alleged that he has science on his side yet is unable to produce a single independent report to support him.

"Knew all along" - a tough charge?

Not a bit. Because, you see, BC wasn't the first place to have their wild salmon savagely destroyed by lice from fish farms. When I met with Irish scientists under the eminent Dr. Patrick Gargan a few years ago in Galway, one of them looked at me and said, and these were his words which I won't mince: "Can't ye fucking well read out there in Canada? Don't you know what happened in Norway ... Scotland ... here in Ireland? Can't ye fucking read?"

We can, but Gordon Campbell won't.

The federal government was also warned in 1991. Norwegian MP John Lilletun came to Canada to tell us that Norwegian salmon farmers were coming here to get away from higher environmental standards they faced back home. Clearly, the warning fell on deaf ears.

The Former Norwegian Attorney General Speaks Out

Many of us could read and spoke out again and again based upon this evidence. Now we can hear from Georg Fredrik Rieber-Mohn, a Norwegian judge who, as Attorney-General drew up important environmental protection guidelines for Norwegian fish farms. Here's what he recently said - and I advise Campbell and his toadies to cover their eyes.

During his remarks he alluded to the pending hockey game between Canada and Norway and said this:

In 1999, I was proud to present the so-called "wild salmon plan" which proposed national protection for the 50 best salmon rivers and the 9 most important fjord-systems across Norway - the national laksfjords - where salmon farms would be prohibited. However, intense lobbying from the salmon farming industry watered down the proposals so that by the time they passed the parliament in 2007 the protected fjords had become smaller and gave less protection against the salmon farming industry.

The result has been a heavy defeat for wild salmon and a huge win for sea lice. Scientific research published by the Norwegian Institute of Nature Research indicates that the areas protected from open net cage salmon farms are simply too small to offer adequate protection from sea lice. (emphasis mine)

*Scientists in Norway detail growing sea lice resistance to the chemicals designed to kill them. The Norwegian Food and Safety Authority recently reported nearly 100 cases of chemical treatment failures as sea lice are now immune. **So serious is the situation that the Directorate of Nature Management - the Norwegian Government's conservation adviser - has called for drastic reductions in farmed salmon production and slaughter of farm stock to reduce the sea lice burden.** (emphasis mine)*

Put simply, we had an open goal to save wild salmon but we missed the target. Now we are dealing with the consequences of poor defending. Atlantic salmon in the wild in Norway are now threatened with extinction in many rivers in Norway. There are many causes to this decline, but in vast areas the farming of salmon is the main factor. Escaped farmed salmon is a huge problem added to the problem of uncontrolled growth of sea lice. Scientists foresee remarkable damaging effects in new areas in the future. [EDITOR'S NOTE - in BC escapees indeed are occupying spawning redds but, thankfully, they do not interbreed with wild salmon].

*In Norway we are underdogs to save wild Atlantic salmon - like in today's hockey game - but nature is resilient and wild salmon can make a comeback if given a fair chance. **The lessons to be learned from Norway are painfully clear but the solution is an easy one.***

If you want to protect wild salmon then you have to move salmon farms away from migration routes. (emphasis mine) *Juvenile wild salmon have to run the gauntlet past salmon farms on their way out to sea and scientific reports show that they are decimated by sea lice - with reports of up to 90% mortality in some regions.*

Even the owner of Marine Harvest - the world's largest salmon farming company and #1 in both Norway and in British Columbia - agrees that we must move the farms. When he was fishing on the River Alta - one of Norway's most majestic wild salmon rivers - in 2007 John Fredriksen made a plea as a passionate angler to relocate open net cages to save wild salmon. (emphasis mine)

Last year, I was honoured to meet with sea lice scientist Alexandra Morton in Oslo. I listened with a sense of deja vu as she outlined how Norwegian companies - who control over 90% of BC's salmon farms - are spreading sea lice to wild salmon. I watched Canadian filmmaker Damien Gillis's film "Dear Norway - Help Us Save Wild Salmon" and I was struck by a strong sense of solidarity and eerie familiarity. (my pride in the work done by my colleagues merited my emphasis)

Yet there is still hope for wild salmon in both Norway and Canada. With the world watching there is a growing sense of public awareness globally and a passion to save wild salmon.

In the name of God, won't Campbell and federal fisheries minister Gail Shea not listen now?

Where has the Media Been?

When you look back at the last near decade you see that both governments had the means to know as much then as they do now. Alex Morton, with only a few in support, painstakingly re-invented the wheel so that Gordon Campbell, who then had sole control of the issue, would see the facts, do his duty and get rid of the fish farms. In 2002 I presented to him, at his request, a paper laying out the scientific evidence of the catastrophe visited upon wild migrating salmon by lice from fish farms. I didn't even get the courtesy of a reply. Many of "the few," and Alex herself, are finally being recognized by the public but why has it taken so long?

The answer is simple: the media, for that read Canwest, has simply refused to cover this issue. It's not the fault of the many fine people who write for these poor excuses for newspapers. They understand as we in fairness should too, that there's no point in writing that which won't be published. Many of them have slipped little bits of information but this is scarcely "holding the government's feet to the fire!" No, I of all people make no criticism of the journalists for like them I too have had to grovel before these bastards.

The paltry 3-4 pages in the *Globe and Mail's* BC Section give better coverage of BC matters than the combined rubbish that comes out of the *Sun* and the *Province*.

This Mess Ought Never to have Started

This mess ought never have started. While the NDP government first licensed these contaminators they had the sense to re-evaluate their decision and place a moratorium on further expansion. I believe they should have banished them but at least they recognized that the "precautionary principle" ought to have been applied and wasn't.

When Campbell took office he knew the facts. He also knew who donated to his party; and he couldn't care less about our wild salmon just as he doesn't give a damn about our rivers. Corporate donors meant everything; idiots like Alexandra Morton and her supporters mustn't be permitted to interfere with unbridled capitalism as preached by the ultra right wing Fraser Institute, a former "Fellow" of which is a senior editor at the *Vancouver Sun*.

Campbell has been untruthful (I prefer a stronger term but my lawyer doesn't) about BC Rail and spouts untruths through his teeth about his energy program which has our great power company, BC Hydro forced to pay double what it's worth to private companies for power it can't use and must therefore export at a huge loss.

Alexandra Morton is going to win her fight, for which for those who care for our salmon, is our fight too - a battle to save the very soul of our province.

The Media in this province ought to have seen this issue for what it so clearly was from the outset and pursued Campbell with the same vigour they quite properly pursued Glen Clark over the "fast ferries." Canwest dislikes the NDP so covers for Campbell - as simple as that.

Heroes and Villains

We in BC have an industry, two governments and a media we should be thoroughly ashamed of.

On the other hand, we have a gallant lady who came from California to watch whales and stayed to make the saving of our wild salmon a sacred task and getting nothing but abuse for her efforts from industry, government and media.

Alexandra Morton deserves the undying affection and deepest gratitude of us all.