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## **Boiled salmon** - Patrick Brown

You are probably familiar with the boiled frog story. It concerns a frog in a pot of water on a stove. At first the water is cold. As it gradually warms, the frog becomes more and more comfortable and relaxed. It gets hotter, but by that time the frog is used to it, and too relaxed to jump out. When the temperature reaches boiling, it's too late for the frog to do anything.

The industrialization of BC's coast is a case of boiled salmon. Project-by-project approvals of run-of-river hydroelectric generation do not permit any appreciation of their cumulative effect on the wilderness or the salmon until it's too late. Each succeeding project is claimed to have no significant effect, but all those 'no-significants' eventually add up to serious environmental damage.

It's the same way with net-pen aquaculture. Farm-by-farm approvals accept that one more farm will have 'no-significant' effect on the number of sea lice available to attack wild salmon smolts on their first journey out to sea. But the cumulative effect is extremely serious.

As a result of a recent court judgment, the regulation of aquaculture is constitutionally a federal responsibility, and it must be shifted from the provincial government to the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans within a year. It is not clear whether the Province intends to approve existing applications in the meantime.

### **Regional District-level Approval**

However, fish farms must still meet the zoning requirements of the regional district where they are located. The Strathcona Regional District (SRD) was recently caught between many strenuous objections to the siting of two very large new net-pen salmon farms on the main migration route of Georgia Basin sockeye up Johnstone Strait, and the claim, by a local salmon processor, that the new farms would provide 135 jobs.

The SRD approved one of two rezoning applications sought by Grieg Seafoods for Sunderland Channel. The SRD turned down Grieg's Yorke Island proposal, and imposed conditions on its Gunner Point approval: that a 'zero lice' policy be maintained, and that the farm be 'converted to closed containment technology as soon as it is commercially available'.

The amended zoning, for one farm only, received third reading; final approval awaits a written undertaking from Grieg Seafoods. It is thought that no time limit will be set for the

closed containment conversion.

Clearly, the sea lice threat becomes more serious with large farms in channels used by wild salmon. With this approval, the heat has again been turned up on the salmon.

There are already some thirty salmon farms in the immediate area, so the SRD could have turned down both applications on the basis that no further zoning of this type would be appropriate. It is difficult, however, for a local government to escape the charge of unfair discrimination.

The real problem lies with the Province, with its policy of 'industrialization by stealth'; approving each successive private sector application (whether for run-of-river power or aquaculture) 'on its merits' with no consideration of cumulative effects. At the moment, we have no evidence that DFO, with their continuing promotion of farmed salmon, will be any better. ☞

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