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Another early warning on salmon

Fish biologist Alexandra Morton of Sointula has identified another virus which appears to be endemic among farmed salmon on the BC coast and could possibly infect wild salmon.

The virus is Piscine retrovirus (PRV), which Norwegian research has associated with the spread of heart and skeletal muscle inflammation (HSMI) among farmed salmon. HSMI is characterized by muscle tissue deterioration, anorexia, and organ damage, and a 20% mortality among farmed salmon. Fish with HSMI swim slowly and near the surface, and are long and thin. Marine Harvest, the Norwegian company dominant in the world farmed salmon industry, lists HSMI as the second leading cause of death among its farmed salmon.


Virus Came From Norway

Morton's research has been documented in a recently published peer reviewed paper in the July 11 issue of *Virology Journal*, co-authored with the Atlantic Veterinary College of the University of Prince Edward Island and Chile's Centro de Investigaciones Biologicas Aplicadas. Through the tracing of genetic sequences of viruses found in farmed salmon (in BC supermarkets),

cutthroat trout from Cultus Lake, chum salmon from near Campbell River, farmed steelhead from Lois Lake, and Atlantic salmon morts (dead fish from fish farms) from the central coast, Morton's paper sets out proof that the PRV virus arrived in BC from Norway in 2007 and in Chile in 2008, give or take a year.

Morton has found PRV in 97% of farmed salmon she has sampled in BC supermarkets. However, HSMI cannot be easily identified because it affects parts of the fish which are gutted before the fish are put on sale.

Farmed salmon are not tested by the provincial government, and the province does not accept that HSMI is caused by PRV. Neither the federal Department of Fisheries nor the Canadian Food Inspection Agency test for PRV.

Norwegian research has established that the virus can be transmitted to wild salmon. However, the presence of PRV has not been established in BC's wild salmon; the theory has been advanced that by the time the disease has advanced to HSMI, an infected salmon, swimming more slowly than its peers, may have been eaten by predators. 

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