



New virus found in farm salmon sold in Canadian supermarkets

HSMI - salmon heart disease

PRESS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sointula, BC (April 13, 2012) Test results report 44 out of 45 farm salmon purchased from several Vancouver Superstore and T&T markets on February 4 & 28, 2012 tested positive for a newly identified Norwegian virus. The seafood departments at these markets informed us these were fresh BC–raised farm salmon. The piscine reovirus weakens the fish’s heart causing Heart and Skeletal Muscle Inflammation (HSMI). HSMI is considered a “[major challenge](#)” in Norway infecting over 400 farms since its symptoms first appeared in 1999. It has also spread to the U.K. The lab reports the virus appears to be the same as found in Norway.

Because scientists only recently identified the virus causing this disease, no screening was possible for the 30 million Atlantic farm salmon eggs imported into BC prior to 2011. When detected for the first time in Chile last year, Sernapesca, the fisheries regulator, responded with “intensified preventative measures”. Reports of HSMI in Chile drove industry share values down. <http://mobile.bloomberg.com/news/2011-10-11/chile-s-multiexport-heads-to-17-month-low-on-fish-virus-concern>

The virus reportedly spreads easily to wild fish near the pens like “[wildfire](#)”. It is known to infect 100% of the fish in a farm, killing up to 20%, causing them to stop feeding and become weak and lethargic. While farm salmon can recover, these behaviours are likely lethal to wild salmon.

The Provincial farm salmon health records released by the Cohen Commission did not report HSMI. The Cohen Commission [Technical Report on Disease and Parasites](#) did not consider HSMI impact on Fraser sockeye. Author Dr. Michael Kent testified that if HSMI appears in BC it would come from the wild fish (Aug. 23, 2011). Dr. Miller, from the DFO Genomic Lab, testified on Dec. 15 that she is detecting the virus in wild sockeye. Because these fish were purchased from a supermarket, their origins are unknown.

“If these fish are not from BC, we have a breach in food security protocol as this virus is going down drains into the ocean as people prepare them for cooking,” says biologist Alexandra Morton. “If the fish were raised in BC, why didn’t anyone in government or industry acknowledge HSMI during the Cohen Inquiry? There is something very wrong when four women with shopping carts find this, but none of the regulatory agencies seem aware of it. I don’t see how Cohen can ignore the potential for HSMI to impact Fraser sockeye. Weakening the heart of a fish that has to travel hundreds of kilometers against the Fraser River seems a bad idea.”

“This hurts,” says Anissa Reed, co-founder of SalmonAreSacred.org. “Even with everything I heard at Cohen, I was still hoping the industry, Christy Clark and Stephen Harper were being a little more careful with wild salmon. I want to know what DFO’s response is to this.”

Morton and Reed hope the Province of BC will report which lease these fish came from. BC grants the licenses of occupation for each salmon farm and so is responsible for the fact the farms are sited in BC’s most important wild salmon habitat. “We need to know, so we can go there and have a look at how the

wild salmon are doing with this disease. Someone has to be testing the wild salmon for this,” concluded Morton.

In 1991, Pat Chamut, Director General DFO Pacific Region, [said](#): *“Continued large-scale introductions from areas of the world including Washington State, Scotland, Norway and even eastern Canada would eventually result in the introduction of exotic disease agents of which the potential impact on both cultured and wild salmonids in BC could be both biologically damaging to the resource and economically devastating to its user groups”* (Chamut former ADM, DFO, to Sarna, Director of Pacific Rim & Trade, Policy Division, International Directories, DFO, 1990). It would appear he was right.

Further testing is underway to determine where the fish were raised and the origins of the virus. The lab sequenced the virus in many samples and found it 99% identical to Norwegian strains of Piscine reovirus.

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