

Friends of the Earth calls for investigation into Canadian Food Inspection Agency's silencing of Canadian salmon scientist

Request seeking immediate action sent to the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development and the Office of the Auditor General of Canada

Ottawa, November 23, 2012 - Friends of the Earth Canada has filed a petition and requested an investigation in response to recent actions by a federal agency to silence a researcher that has played a key role in investigating infectious salmon anemia (ISA) in salmon from British Columbia.

In a recent letter, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) asked the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) to strip the reference lab certification status from Dr. Frederick Kibenge's lab at the Atlantic Veterinary College in PEI. The lab is a leading facility known for its expertise in detecting diseases in fish - it is one of only two laboratories in the world recognized for its ability to detect ISA in infected fish.

"We are concerned about efforts to silence a scientist who has played a leading role in uncovering the widespread infectious salmon anemia (ISA) in salmon. Given the CFIA's recent experience with XL Foods Inc. and E. coli, you would think they would pay close attention to this warning of the ISA virus in salmon," says Beatrice Olivastri, CEO of Friends of the Earth Canada.

"We believe Dr. Frederick Kibenge's work should have been welcomed, and strategically used in informing CFIA's own surveillance work to protect wild salmon rather than hide the extent of the spread of the ISA virus," says Olivastri. "This can only be a witch hunt against someone who doesn't agree with the government line, and is suffering from the government's bullying."

Decertification of the lab would reduce Canadians' ability to know about the presence of this disease in salmon, and would also have international ramifications, as people from other countries also send samples to the lab.

Friends of the Earth Canada is requesting an independent investigation into the silencing of Canadian scientists and the cover-up of a disease that threatens wild Pacific salmon in British Columbia. The request for investigation, or petition, is addressed to the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development and to the Office of the Auditor General of Canada.

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***Friends of the Earth Canada** is the Canadian member of Friends of the Earth International, the world's largest grassroots environmental network campaigning on today's most urgent environmental and social issues.*