



## Media Release

### **One of Eastern Canada's leading scientists and his lab stripped of international credentials after reporting a controversial virus in British Columbia salmon**

**(July 3, 2013 Vancouver, B.C.)** Beginning in October 2011, Dr. Fred Kibenge's lab at the Atlantic Veterinary College located at the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI) has found that some wild British Columbia salmon and a number of Atlantic farm salmon are testing positive for segments of the Infectious Salmon Anemia virus (ISAv), a lethal salmon virus associated with salmon farming worldwide.

Dr. Fred Kibenge, chair of the Department of Pathology and Microbiology and professor of virology at the Atlantic Veterinary College, is recognized as one of the leading experts on the ISA virus. His lab was one of only two World Organization on Animal Health (OIE) reference labs for the ISA virus and the only independent lab in Canada with international credibility for ISA test results.

Despite Dr. Kibenge's findings, federal and provincial government officials reported that they could not detect the virus in B.C., and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) ordered an audit of Dr. Kibenge's lab.

Following the audit, in November 2012 the CFIA made recommendations to the World OIE to suspend Dr. Kibenge's reference laboratory status. On June 13, 2013, the OIE World Delegates approved the CFIA's request: Kibenge's lab no longer has OIE reference lab status.

During the Cohen Commission, a 26 million dollar judicial inquiry into the decline of the Fraser River sockeye in British Columbia, the CFIA testified that if the ISA virus were confirmed, it would mean that B.C. would be listed as ISAv positive. This would limit export of B.C. farmed salmon, as the U.S. has stated they do not want ISA virus-contaminated salmon crossing the border.

"So if, let's say, we do find ISA in B.C. and all of a sudden markets are closed, our role is then to try to renegotiate or negotiate market access to those countries. If we can't meet it, (their requirements) then there will be no trade basically." Kim Klotins, CFIA, Cohen Commission Testimony.

Morgan Lascinsky of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) said salmon with the virus would not be allowed across the border because American law prohibits the importation of any diseased animal.

In an interview published November 23, 2012 in the *Globe and Mail*, Dr. Kibenge commented, "What they are doing here is essentially punishing me for having testified at the Cohen Commission and trying to suppress the findings. It's an attack on my credibility. I just feel compelled to continue with my research work because there is nothing here that I can see that I've done wrong."

Dr. Kibenge worked for years without controversy, testing for viruses for the aquaculture industry. In 2007, his lab diagnosed ISA in Chile after the virus was introduced via Atlantic salmon egg imports from Norway some years earlier. This outbreak went on to cause 2 billion dollars worth of damage to Chile's salmon farming industry. Chile has no wild salmon.

Dr. Kibenge was subpoenaed to testify at the Cohen Commission. In December 2011, he told the Commission about the positive test results for ISA virus sequences he obtained from Rivers Inlet Fraser River salmon.

Dr. Kibenge's finding is controversial because it could mean that the salmon farming industry is responsible for importing an internationally reportable virus from Europe into B.C. via Atlantic salmon egg imports. Internationally reportable diseases are those that are required by law to be reported to health authorities.

Dr. Kibenge is not alone in finding positive test results for ISAv in B.C. salmon. Three Canadian

government labs: Ms Nelle Gagne, DFO's lab at Moncton, N.B; Dr. Kyle Garver and Dr. Kristi Miller, DFO lab in Nanaimo; and Dr. Are Nylund at the University of Bergen, Norway have also reported finding ISA virus sequences in B.C. salmon during the Cohen Commission.

Immediately after Dr. Kibenge's lab lost its international clout, the CFIA announced that its own testing of 4,175 wild salmon produced no positives for ISAv, but biologist Alexandra Morton notes that the CFIA is using a testing technique which has never worked to identify ISA virus in wild salmon. The technique, "virus isolation," involves catching the virus alive and culturing it. The only way this requirement of proof has ever been fulfilled is during an active disease outbreak on a farm where the fresh sample of a farmed salmon could be rushed to a lab very quickly.

Morton questions why the CFIA refuses to test the millions of Atlantic salmon in BC, the foreign salmon known to carry the ISA virus. "It doesn't matter how many thousands of fish you test if you are using the wrong test and the wrong fish," she commented.

In 2012, the CFIA was audited by the USFDA after E. coli-contaminated Canadian beef entered the U.S. food supply, sickening at least 18 people and resulting in the largest beef recall in Canadian history. Infected beef slipped by CFIA surveillance despite numerous red flags. It was U.S. border inspectors who discovered the presence of E. coli in a shipment of beef from XL Foods destined for the U.S. market.

"The World Organization for Animal Health, our global first line of defense against farm animal epidemics, just stacked the odds against stopping ISA virus from spreading in British Columbia," observed Alexandra Morton. She concluded, "Based on current trends, I predict the work I am doing with Dr. Kibenge, testing B.C. farmed and wild salmon for European viruses, will be shut down and only the CFIA will be allowed to report on salmon viruses in B.C. I expect ISA virus reports will be successfully denied for some period of time and then there will be outbreaks, like everywhere else in the world, but this time no one can predict what this will do to our wild salmon."

**For more information, contact:** Alexandra Morton, 250-974-7086

[www.salmonconfidential.ca/for-media/cfia-takes-out-kibenge/](http://www.salmonconfidential.ca/for-media/cfia-takes-out-kibenge/)

**Shooting the messenger: Lab stripped of credentials after finding infectious virus in BC salmon**

<http://www.vancouverobserver.com/opinion/shooting-messenger-lab-stripped-credentials-after-finding-infectious-virus-bc-salmon>

**The deck keeps stacking higher against wild salmon**

[http://alexandramorton.typepad.com/alexandra\\_morton/2013/06/the-world-organization-for-animal-health-oe-lists-as-its-number-one-objective-to-ensure-transparency-in-the-global-anima.html](http://alexandramorton.typepad.com/alexandra_morton/2013/06/the-world-organization-for-animal-health-oe-lists-as-its-number-one-objective-to-ensure-transparency-in-the-global-anima.html)

**Ottawa moves against PEI lab that reported virus in B.C. salmon**

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/ottawa-moves-against-pei-lab-that-reported-virus-in-bc-salmon/article5582798/>

**Pictures for media use:**

[https://www.dropbox.com/sh/qsu7sngqvrsz0r6/vl2\\_-1wjE2](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/qsu7sngqvrsz0r6/vl2_-1wjE2)

**High resolution video clips of an interview with Fred Kibenge available for download:**

<http://www.yousendit.com/download/WFJVYUorYStRR2M5WThUQw>

**Youtube video clips from Cohen Commission of labs testifying to have found ISA:**

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=g-Z7TliT8x4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=g-Z7TliT8x4)