



Press Release

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Ocean Fish Farms – ISAV Virus Detected

Wild Salmon Defenders Alliance

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Ocean Fish Farms – ISA Virus Bombs?

News of the first published evidence that a European variant of the infectious salmon anaemia virus (ISAV) is present in British Columbia is extremely disturbing. The peer-reviewed study was published in the *Virology Journal*, a scientific publication from BioMed Central, a leading academic open access publisher in the areas of biology, medicine and health. Co-author Dr. Rick Routledge said that the potential of the ISA virus to be contributing to widespread decline in sockeye salmon populations must not be taken lightly. Dr. Alexandra Morton, independent biologist with Raincoast Research Society, stated, “This work gives B.C. and our U.S. neighbors the opportunity to avoid tragic consequences.”

“I’m so glad to see this paper finally published. I produced a documentary about exactly this issue in 2013 called *Salmon Confidential* which documents evidence of dangerous European salmon viruses including ISAV which have been introduced to our wild Pacific salmon through farmed Atlantic salmon eggs imported from Europe,” added filmmaker Twyla Roscovich. “The film is free to view online for anyone interested in the backstory.”

River First Nations titleholders have never given their consent to have fish farms sited on the migration routes of Fraser River wild salmon, and have made clear their opposition to ocean fish farms for many years. “We see too many wild salmon in our nets with open sores. Some look good on the outside but when we open them, we find numerous white and green balls that look like cancer cells. We burn these fish instead of throwing them back in the environment so the bears, eagles and other wild life don’t get sick. We witnessed too many pre-spawn deaths. This study adds to our grave concerns about fish farms, and they must be removed from the ocean,” asserted Shane John, a Katz First Nation fisher.

The Ahousaht First Nation made the historic decision in 2015 to have a fish farm removed from their territory. “By not allowing this fish farm in our territory, we gave the wild salmon of the Atleo river a fighting chance to survive, and we protected nearby clam beds to feed future generations,” said Lennie John of Ahousaht First Nation. “To me, this study reconfirms fish farms don’t belong in the ocean,” Lennie added.

This study warrants a call to action by all stakeholders. We must send a strong message to both the federal and provincial governments that we can no longer tolerate the ocean fish farm industry continuing to play Russian roulette with our endangered wild salmon. Too much is at stake. Business as usual expansion must stop. Open-net fish farms could very well be ticking virus bombs, and raises the spectre of wild salmon vanishing, with devastating consequences for biodiversity and the wild salmon economy. To prevent this, we need to honor the precautionary principle by removing open-net fish farms from the ocean. An emerging land-based aquaculture industry, properly regulated, would be a sustainable alternative to ocean fish farms, a solution whose time has come. Government regulations protecting wild salmon from all industrial harm is also imperative.

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