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## **Here We Go Again –Commentators suggesting sockeye returns affected by salmon farms –this link to Salmon Farms is Convenient, but Unfounded**

Campbell River – July 30, 2009

Early Fraser River Sockeye returns show a reduction in the number of returning adult fish in 2009. The plight of the Fraser River sockeye parallels Pacific salmon returns along the entire west coast of North America. BC salmon farmers share these concerns, but disagree with those who conclude that salmon farming is responsible for these declines. Blaming salmon farming operations for declining wild stocks may be convenient but it is unfounded. One commentator says “putting aside all natural poor conditions for these fish” and then concludes that salmon farms are to blame. This makes no sense.

Natural causes such as warm ocean conditions leave juvenile sockeye vulnerable in their early life cycle. As well, reputable researchers now understand that Pacific salmon are resistant to damage from sea lice except in their extreme infancy when first leaving their natal rivers. In the case of Fraser River Sockeye, since the closest salmon farm is over 110 km away from the Fraser River’s mouth, there is no opportunity for out migrating Fraser River salmon fry to come in contact with farmed salmon during their critical early life stages and; therefore, no chance for the alleged sea louse transmission to occur. Additionally, since Sockeye salmon spend the first year of their life cycle in freshwater, they have fully developed immune systems by the time they migrate to saltwater.

Sea lice, a naturally occurring organism in the Pacific Ocean, reside on salmon, herring, stickleback and other marine fish. To minimize opportunities for lice from farmed salmon to transfer to wild salmon, lice levels at BC salmon farms are regulated and monitored by the farms and audited by the BC Ministry of Agriculture and Lands. Once motile sea lice levels reach the very low level of three lice per fish, the site must treat with a veterinary-prescribed medicine to eliminate the parasite. This management technique has proven to be extremely effective for controlling sea lice on farmed fish.

Though research studies to-date show no direct ‘cause and effect’ relationship between sea lice, salmon farms and wild salmon, more studies are needed to give a complete understanding of interactions between wild and farmed salmon and to define factors that are affecting wild salmon populations along the entire Pacific coast of North America. BC salmon farmers actively contribute to and participate in these ongoing research efforts.

[Link to BC Salmon Farmers Association’s sea lice issues and risks handout](#)

**Fast facts about BC Salmon Farming:**

Salmon farmers in BC work in the most highly regulated environment of any producing region and we are proud that salmon farming:

- Is BC's largest agricultural export and plays an increasingly important role on meeting growing global demand for BC salmon
- Leads the fisheries sector when measured against gross domestic product (GDP).  
According to research done by PriceWaterhouse Coopers, salmon aquaculture's economic output in 2007 was over \$800 million.
- Employs more than 6000 men and women, mostly in BC's coastal communities

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**For more information:**

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