

Is aquaculture a real success for rural NL?

Written by Winston Fiander, St. Philip's, NL
Thursday, 01 January 2015 14:00

In a Telegram article by Ashley Fitzpatrick entitled “Province Releases Aquaculture Strategy “ the new Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture, Vaughn Granter, makes the claim that aquaculture is “a real success for rural Newfoundland and Labrador”. Similarly, Cyr Couturier, President of the Newfoundland Aquaculture Industry Association spins the same message of success and adds that “ the investment is very small compared to what the returns have been. It’s demonstrable”.

The problem with both statements is their claims are not “demonstrable”. We are left wondering what criteria Minister Granter used in concluding that aquaculture has been a “success”. Did he take into consideration the following:

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traditional fishing grounds are being turned into aquaculture sites and fishers are being driven from fisheries that have sustained them and their communities for centuries,
marine facilities intended for fishers are being bought up to service the aquaculture industry while fishers are being excluded from service facilities they depend on to maintain their boats and gear,
wild salmon stocks are diminishing in south coast rivers while they are growing in rivers on the west and north-east coast,
escapes of fish from aquaculture sites into local waters and beyond may be carrying diseases and altering wild stocks,
divers report that the feces and feed waste in aquaculture sites is knee deep,
debris from aquaculture sites are littering beaches in the region,
once pristine, picturesque communities are being turned into ugly industrial sites infested with rodents,
the roads to the Coast of Bays from the Trans Canada highway, and connecting communities are being destroyed by a daily stream of heavy trucks transporting feed in and fish out of the region,

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aquaculture fish are only minimally processed in the region and shipped out for processing depriving the regions fish plant workers of jobs they are skilled to do and leaving processing facilities lie idle,

diseased fish is costing us millions of tax payers' dollars to compensate corporate entities for their losses and removing all incentives for them to prevent diseases from occurring, and aquaculture fish are being fed chemicals that may be posing a risk to our health.

Cyr Couturier says the success is "demonstrable". I call on him to practice what he is preaching and tell us how much our governments have "invested" in subsidizing the industry, and could he "demonstrate" that the "the investment is very small" in relation to the "returns". "Demonstrable" evidence of his contention that are we getting value for our money would include the following:

how much governments have spent,

who has been the recipient of the expenditures,

what was the purpose of the subsidies,

how are subsidies monitored to see that our money is being spent as intended, and

what specifically are the "returns" and how much of the "returns" stay in the communities versus flow to corporate entities and out of the province.

The Minister and the Newfoundland Aquaculture Industry Association seem to be fixated on growth of the industry, however I would be more comfortable with their leadership of the industry if they were to shift their vision away from "growth" to a more balanced approach that is focused on maximizing the benefits to communities, providing a quality chemical free product to consumers, and minimizing the environmental footprint.

I want my government to cease being a cheer leader for the aquaculture industry and regulate it for us as consumers and as owners of the habitat on which that the industry is dependant.

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