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CAAR-MHC op-ed
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Environmental groups and largest salmon farming company work together on closed containment pilot project

Today's problems cannot be solved if we still think the way we thought when we created them - Albert Einstein

One has to be forward thinking, open minded and innovative to develop truly sustainable ways of managing natural resources and people's interaction with nature. This is true for most everything we do in the world, and it's true when it comes to salmon farming.

In the midst of the debate over salmon farming on British Columbia's coast, the Coastal Alliance for Aquaculture Reform (CAAR), which includes Living Oceans Society, David Suzuki Foundation, Watershed Watch, T Buck Suzuki Foundation and Georgia Strait Alliance and Marine Harvest Canada (MHC), a division of the largest salmon farming company in the world, have been working together to find a path forward. Together CAAR and MHC decided to focus efforts in two important areas. First, to test the environmental and economic sustainability of closed containment technology and second, to use improved farm and area-

based management to reduce the likelihood that farmed salmon would infect out-migrating juvenile salmon with sea lice in the Broughton Archipelago.

To this end, MHC plans to design and secure funding for a commercial scale closed containment pilot project early in 2010. This project will be carried out in association with CAAR. A detailed work plan for the project is under development including timelines for design, technical due diligence, and finalizing of an economic model to be used to evaluate the sustainability performance of commercial scale closed containment technology. The workplan is scheduled for completion the end of March with a public announcement to follow shortly thereafter.

The closed containment pilots – a vital component of the initiative – will provide data essential to answer questions related to a transition from conventional ways of farming salmon. While closed containment technology is already being used to grow salmon and trout in Washington State, China, and Norway – and by MHC to raise smolts – questions remain about the viability of commercial-scale application of the technology for raising salmon to market. The pilot project will combine lessons learned from other closed containment initiatives and MHC knowledge and experience to help answer questions such as: Will commercial-scale closed containment be capable of growing quality fish? Will this technology produce the desired environmental benefits? Will the technology prove to be economically and financially viable?

CAAR and MHC have also developed a Coordinated Area Management Plan (CAMP) for the Broughton Archipelago, an interim management plan that strives to reduce the likelihood of farmed salmon transferring sea lice to wild salmon during the out migration season. The initiative is designed to keep sea lice levels on farmed salmon during the out-migration season of juvenile pink

and chum salmon (March 1st to June 30th) below levels recommended by regulators. This is done by establishing alternating fallow routes and applying precautionary sea lice treatments. Initial science-based monitoring results indicate that, for the time being, CAMP may be an effective management tool.

We have learned a great deal about reducing the risk of sea lice in the Broughton Archipelago through the Coordinated Area Management Plan. Now we are seeking a greater understating of the benefits of technological innovation. But frankly we can't do this on our own. Both the provincial and federal governments need to step up to the plate. They need to support the CAMP through regulatory action and they need to invest along with us in technological innovation. Governments need to get on board and help us achieve success. As the Great Physicist advised, problems will best be solved by new ways of thinking and therefore acting.

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