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Trip To Norway Helps To Make Up Our Minds

Campbell River Mirror - December 04, 2008 by Fred Glendale, Councilor and Resource Manager, Da'naxda/Awaetlala Nation

Today, B.C.'s aboriginal peoples are striving for the same things as everyone else – access to healthcare, a solid education for our children, meaningful employment, and respectful care for seniors.

We know these come about through economic opportunity, but it is difficult to find lasting and practical work in our communities on Vancouver Island and the mainland coast.

First Nations people are defined by these traditional places and our stories are steeped in history and tradition.

However, our remote locations often mean that these basic expectations and services are denied us.

Recently, economic opportunity has come to the Kitsoo/Xai'xais people at Klemtu in the form of salmon aquaculture. (In November they celebrated the 10 year anniversary of their partnership with Marine Harvest Canada)

But salmon aquaculture is controversial with some BC First Nations – including some of our neighbouring Nations in the Broughton Archipelago.

The Da'naxda'xw/Awaetlala Nation, which I represent, has been watching the development of salmon aquaculture for a while now. We know it has provided employment, stability and hope for the future for places like Klemtu. But what can aquaculture offer us? And at what cost to our environment? (Our traditional territory encompasses the upper Knight Inlet and all of the rivers and streams that flow into it.)

So when myself and 10 other Island First Nation leaders were invited to go to Stavanger, Norway last month to attend a global aquaculture conference and to see first-hand what the birth place and future of the salmon aquaculture industry, it just made good sense to go. This would help us make up our own minds about what future aquaculture might have for our people.

It was a busy five days. We saw salmon farms and processing plants, a cod hatchery, a halibut farm, and a salmon aquaculture research centre. We met with the Norwegian fisheries minister—Helga Pedersen, the first indigenous person of Norway (Sami) to hold a senior



government role – and heard presentations from biologists, industry leaders, and environmental organizations.

A highlight was a visit to Rygjabø College, a 95-year-old institution on a small island, not unlike Harbledown Island where our home community is located.

For decades this small college has been teaching high school students from Stavanger, one of Norway’s major cities, in food preparation, the basics of commercial fishing and fish processing. In the 1970s the school added to its curriculum and has given an introduction to fish farming to about 85 students each year.

Leaving the Rygjabø school, several of us said, “We could see something like that in one of our communities one day.”

We also soon realized that aquaculture requires a lot of financial investment, commitment over a long development time, and a ton of help from scientific researchers to get started.

One presentation by an Australian tuna aquaculture operator talked about 20 years of research and the military precision with which eggs are sourced from wild brood fish to be used in tuna aquaculture.

Our main interests right now are to work alongside salmon farmers and to develop shellfish aquaculture.

We want to ensure that our traditional resources remain healthy and we are working with Marine Harvest Canada on a clam beach rejuvenation study.

In Norway, we were surprised by the many, many species now being raised through commercial aquaculture – cod, halibut, tilapia, trout, catfish, and carp were discussed but oysters, shrimp, mussels, and yes, clams are also being produced through aquaculture as well.

The future for aquaculture looks strong. Commercial capture of most species is not increasing and about one-third of the worldwide demand for fish is currently being met through aquaculture.

Demand for fish is increasing worldwide as the health benefits of eating more fish are reported by more and more research.

We learned that fish production is also more environmentally efficient than other forms of protein like beef or pork or chicken.

Raising fish uses little petroleum energy and fish consume comparatively very little water or raw materials for feed.

As a result fish culture will be less affected by climate change than land raised animals.

Certainly there are environmental concerns about aquaculture.

But we were encouraged by research and development that continually addresses these concerns.



For example, decreasing amounts of fish meal used in aquaculture feed, improving food conversion rates in salmon aquaculture, (B.C. salmon farmers now convert each pound of feed into one pound of salmon).

Once accused of being a waste of fish they are now on their way to becoming a net fish protein producer.

We have clearly heard the objections and voices of those, including First Nations, who oppose the aquaculture industry in B.C.

Now we have clearly heard and observed what others have to say and how aquaculture has developed in Norway.

We want to work with Marine Harvest Canada to satisfy ourselves that their farms do not harm our environment.

We are pleased that this company has welcomed our monitoring interest.

Now we can better decide about our own future with aquaculture from the strength of understanding that is informed by fact and balanced by our own experience.

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View the Campbell River Mirror article at
http://www.bclocalnews.com/vancouver_island_north/campbellrivermirror/opinion/35567409.html

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