

SALMON FARM DOESN'T AFFECT WILD HARVEST STRESSES BAND MANAGER

Les Neasloss feeding salmon at Jackson Pass site.

Environmental impact nominal says First Nations leader

By Quentin Dodd

No one should be fooled into thinking that BC's Kitsoo First Nation has sold out and sacrificed any part of its environmental heritage in order to become part of the salmon-farming industry.

That was part of the message from Kitsoo Chief Councillor and Band Manager Percy Starr in an extensive interview with *Northern Aquaculture* recently.

Starr told the publication that in coming to an economic development agreement with Nutreco's Marine Harvest Canada, the Kitsoo retained all final decision-making powers regarding anything which could impact the environment in their traditional territory. That includes shutting down the farm if it is felt necessary to protect seafood stocks and the farm's environment.

The company supplied all the infrastructure for the farm but Starr said the band remains the tenure-holder for the site, which opened nearly four years ago as part of that agreement.

And Starr said that although he and others clearly spelled it out in advance to members of his community that they might have to sacrifice some of their harvesting ability as a result of the farm, so far that hasn't been the case. The First Nation's members still use the area of Jackson Pass around the farm extensively for harvesting a wide variety of seafood, which forms a major part of their culture and diet.

If you do it right from the beginning, said Starr, the salmon farming industry – even using Atlantic salmon – doesn't need to be a problem for anyone in BC.

Starr, a leading exponent of the industry on behalf of the Kitsoo First Nation, admits as Chief Councillor and Band manager that these days he's more a politician than a fisheries expert – though he still has a small gillnetter he uses for food fisheries.

He told *Northern Aquaculture* that one of the main key requirements for the industry has to be that the First Nations most directly affected by a particular plan or proposal have to be fully consulted suitably in advance. He also said they must have a clear understanding with the investing fish farm company to give them decision-making powers – particularly when it comes to environment concerns.

That includes the choice of site, Starr said: It has to be in deep water, with good water flows through the pens, located not on a major salmon route, and run with a close eye being kept on the environment.

That's the regime under which members of the Kitsoo run a salmon farm about 45 minutes' ride by boat from the village, in Jackson Pass. Under agreement with MHC, the Kitsoo

provide almost all of the personnel, both there and at a processing plant which already existed in Klemtu and



Klemtu salmon farmer Daryl Hall.

was specifically upgraded for the program.

The fish belong to MHC and are shipped out gutted and gilled to one of three alternative receiving ports for trans-shipment to the market.

The objective, said Starr, was to provide employ-



Localsh Bay, Jackson Pass - near Klemtu, BC - Marine Harvest and the Kitsoo/Xaixais operate three salmon farms under an ISO 14001 Environment Program and independent environmental monitoring by the Kitsoo/Xaixais. Pictured here is the activity surrounding the installation of extra nets to ensure no escape of fish during harvest.



"There are clams and cockles and prawns and red sea urchins, and we still eat them all. It's still part of our culture and diet, and it's still flourishing."

Percy Starr
Kitsoo Band Manager

ment for as many people in Klemtu as possible.

To move into fish farming as an alternative to traditional fishing, Starr said, the villagers were told about possible implications. He said though that sea urchins and all other shellfish and seafood seem to thrive around the farm, and it is now hoped to add five more sites, to further reduce the unemployment level in the village – already more than halved from over 80%.

"There's clams and cockles and seafood and prawns and red sea urchins, and we still eat them," he said. "It's still a part of our culture and our diet, and it's still flourishing. We have this agreement with Marine Harvest and if it (the farm) was doing damage to the environment, we wouldn't hesitate a minute to shut it down."

Starr also said that specially-trained divers from the band are paid to monitor the site closely and regularly dive on it to take pictures of any build-up of waste and material on the bottom. So far there's been no problem at all.

Starr, who regularly issues open invitations to people to visit the area and see what the band has been able to achieve under a First-Nations-first agreement with industry, said the band still handles roe-on-kelp and processes sea cucumbers, sea urchins and even goducks.



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