

Community groups appeal Nova Scotia's approval of fish farms

Asking Supreme Court to revoke licenses that may devastate St. Mary's Bay tourism and fishing industries

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

HALIFAX – Local community members from St. Mary's Bay and the Atlantic Salmon Federation today filed an appeal to the Nova Scotia Supreme Court to oppose the creation of one of the province's largest fish farms in the community's traditional fishing grounds.

Fisheries and Aquaculture Minister Sterling Belliveau's approval in early June of two massive salmon feedlots received overwhelming opposition from local communities. The communities believe the feedlots, which will stock almost two million fish, will devastate their tourism and traditional fishing industries. The farms also threaten several endangered species, including the North Atlantic right whale, roseate tern, harlequin duck and wild Atlantic salmon.

"The appeal addresses whether the Minister had the constitutional jurisdiction to issue the licenses and whether it was reasonable for him to neglect communities concerns, gaps in the scientific evidence and socio-economic impacts," said Ecojustice lawyer Hugh Wilkins.

Ecojustice is representing the St. Mary's Bay Coastal Alliance, the Atlantic Salmon Federation, Freeport Community Development Association and the Villages of Freeport, Tiverton and Westport. The groups are calling on the government to revoke the licenses and to put the interests of the local communities before the province's aggressive aquaculture development plans.

"Families have been fishing lobster here for generations," says David Pugh of the Village of Westport. "It is well-paying, sustainable work that supports our communities. The arrival of these salmon feedlots will put an end to that, displacing the lobster fishery with lower-paying, unskilled jobs."

St. Mary's Bay is one of the richest lobster fishing grounds in the world and is being considered by Parks Canada as part of a significant new national marine conservation area.

"Evidence from similar feedlots in New Brunswick shows that they will significantly deteriorate the habitat for key commercially harvested fish and significantly displace and diminish the quality of the existing lobster fishery in the area," said Karen Crocker of the St. Mary's Bay Coastal Alliance.

"The Minister completely ignored the many concerns and comments of the individuals, communities and groups most affected by this project", said Andy Moir of the Freeport Community Development Association.

"The cumulative impacts of new and existing fish farms in the Bay of Fundy are adding up", said Bill Taylor, president of the Atlantic Salmon Federation. "Without sufficient consideration of the impacts of all these operations on endangered species, like wild Atlantic salmon, the Minister's decision was clearly unreasonable."

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