

Seals to blame for loss at fish farm

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The fish farm by Coffin Island has lost about 13,000 fish, but the company that owns the farm says it's doubtful many survived.

Ocean Trout Farms Inc. says between March 22 and April 3, divers discovered several tears in netting in the pens holding the fish. About 5,000 fish were found dead, and another 8,000 were unaccounted for.

"Given the number of seals and the feeding patterns of those seals in the area it would seem very unlikely that many of the fish survived," said spokesperson Murray Schalin.

The company installed a welded Aqua-grid poly net last May as a trial run. The product was supposed to have a longer life span, be easier to clean and provide better protection against predators. According to Schalin, the cost of the product was almost double that of normal netting. The netting has successfully been used in the Southern Hemisphere, but never tested in the North.

Divers over the course of the last month discovered and repaired a five-foot tear and several smaller holes. Many of the fish showed signs of scratches and markings believed to be the result of seals.

The final loss came on April 3, when divers found an entire panel of net missing and an empty pen.

The company says it has pulled up the rest of the netting and will go back to its traditional netting.

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The company has had one other recorded loss, back in 2007 when Hurricane Noel damaged the pens and 500,000 fish were lost.

This latest loss has fishermen from the Medway River Salmon Association concerned over the natural fish stocks. Darrell Tingley, president of the association says farm fish could spread dis-

ease and lice to the wild stocks with potentially devastating effects.

Tingley also added some rainbow trout have already been caught in the waterways.

Since this is the second time this has happened, the association is questioning whether the operation should shut down and moved to a land based oper-

ation.

Nova Scotia's Dept of Fisheries and Aquaculture communications officer Celeste Sulliman says they are waiting for an update on the situation from the aquaculture team, but are confident this is an isolated incident.

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