

# Fishin' for trouble.

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As concern over BSE was grabbing headlines, Bill 48 was quietly placed on the Order Paper by Agriculture Minister John van Dongen.

Innocuous enough in its title — Agriculture, Food and Fisheries Statutes Amendment Act — but make no mistake about it: Bill 48 holds serious implications for BC's farmers.

Oh it does some good things. Poking a finger in the ribs of Delta Council, Bill 48's changes to the Local Government Act make it illegal for municipalities to do through the back door (e.g., zoning) what they can't do through the front door (farm bylaws, which must be endorsed by the Minister).

But Bill 48 also contains a dark side: a series of amendments to the Farm Practices Protection and Local Government acts that give BC's fish "farmers" the same Right to Farm protection enjoyed by BC's "real" farmers.

(When is a farmer not a farmer? When he wears flippers. On that, most farmers would agree!)

Behind every piece of legislation there must be public trust. British Columbians support legislated "right to farm" protection because they have come to trust in both our farmers and our regulations to deliver sustainable stewardship.

Coastal salmon farms are an entirely different kettle of fish. Their very mention is enough to raise community hackles up and down the coast and amongst environmentally conscious British Columbians across the province.

From the World Wildlife Fund's May 2003 Nature Audit to the findings of the Environmental Assessment Office, the Standing Senate Committee on Fisheries ("the salmon farming industry is a state of deep denial"), the Office of the Commissioner for Aquaculture Development and the Auditor General, the message on fish farming is a consistent one:

The industry is growing rapidly. World production of farm fish has doubled in the past decade, in BC, it has increased by tenfold.

The fish farming industry is highly concentrated. Globally, 30 firms control 90% of the production, in BC 12 firms run 121 salmon farms, down from 50 firms in 1989.

Industry regulation is weak. A national aquaculture act to regulate activity still does not exist for Canada (WWF).

Monitoring is difficult. No control areas, poor monitoring (of discharges, nutrient loading and taking of wild fish for feed) and inadequate research (on environmental effects of toxic chemicals and antibiotics, habitat impacts and genetic contamination) make ecosystem impacts – especially cumulative effects – difficult if not impossible to monitor. (WWF)

Industry Compliance is poor. One example: 48% of BC fish farms are non-compliant with net maintenance (BCMAFF, 2001).

Enforcement is low. As both regulators and promoters of the industry, Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the provinces are in a conflict of interest (WWF). In his 2001 Report, Canada's Auditor General gave Fisheries and Oceans Canada a failing grade in "carrying out its regulatory responsibilities to enforce the fisheries act with respect to BC salmon farming."

Fin Fish farming practices in BC are the worst in Canada. When WWF measured the “footprints” of Canada’s fish-farming regions based on the effect of inputs (such as antibiotics and pesticides), outputs (such as nitrogen and phosphorus), diseases (such as sea lice), predator control devices (such as high powered acoustic harassment devices) and pen infrastructure (a consideration for escaped alien species), BC’s Broughton Archipelago topped the list as most environmentally-damaged fish farm region in Canada. (Second was the Bay of Fundy. Both have heavy concentrations of open-cage salmon farms and together produced 90% of the farmed salmon in Canada in 2001.)

Bio-diversity loss, disease and genetic contamination are documented. WWF found cases of escaped, open-caged Atlantic salmon surviving and successfully breeding in native Pacific salmon habitat. They found evidence of untreated waste and antibiotics and of disease transmission from farmed fish to wild stocks (e.g. sea lice in the Broughton Archipelago). They found biodiversity loss related to the taking of wild fish to feed farm fish. (It takes 4 pounds of wild-caught fish to produce enough fishmeal to grow one pound of farmed fish. In 2000, one-third of the 96 million ton wild fishery was devoted to the production of fishmeal and fish oil to feed the 45 million tons of farmed fish. As wild fish species - anchovies, pilchards, mackerel and herring, all important parts of the marine food chain — are depleted, this we will see repercussions for commercial fish species, dolphins and seabirds.)

These are the guys Victoria wants our farmers to get into bed with? I don’t think so...

Fish farmers are not farmers. They have not earned the right to protection under the Right to Farm Act. And our farmers can’t risk losing it – its too pivotal to the sustainable future of this province.

Tell Agriculture Minister John van Dongen to pull these sections of the Bill before it goes ahead.

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Take 30 seconds to visit [www.theworkshed.com](http://www.theworkshed.com) and sign the petition to PM Jean Chrétien - copied to the Canadian Cattleman’s Association -calling for technical and financial support to Canada’s beef farmers need to get through the BSE crisis.