

BRIEFING NOTE: Aquaculture Goals

Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act
March 2022

GOAL IN EGCCRA:

#14 (a): The Government's goals with respect to aquaculture are "to support low-impact sustainable aquaculture through a licensing process that weighs environmental considerations and includes provincial regulation for potential environmental impacts, animal welfare and fish health."

OUR ANALYSIS OF THE GOAL:

We are pleased to see support for low impact aquaculture and improved licensing processes. However, the implication of this goal depends heavily on how the government defines 'low-impact', 'sustainable', and 'environmental impacts.' Open net-pen finfish aquaculture is by far the most ecologically damaging and socially controversial form of aquaculture in Nova Scotia today, with widespread effects on local ecosystems, traditional fisheries, and wild Atlantic salmon populations. While there are a number of improvements that can be made to licensing provisions for aquaculture generally, such provisions will not fix the fundamental issues associated with the open net-pen technologies. Developments of this kind must not be defined as 'sustainable' or 'low-impact'.

EGCCRA could be more explicit in this regard by including commitments to support sustainable shellfish, seaweed and land-based closed-containment aquaculture alternatives, and laying the groundwork for a just transition away from open net-pens throughout the province. This would position Nova Scotia as an aquaculture industry leader, reduce environmental risk and social conflict in coastal communities, and build on our province's infrastructure and expertise in seafood. A comprehensive and ongoing consultation with stakeholders and rights-holders would further help to define the role of various forms of aquaculture as part of a broader economic vision for coastal Nova Scotia.

ACHIEVING AND ENHANCING THE GOAL:

The following recommendations will help to better define, strengthen, and achieve Goal #14:

1. Develop a reliable and manageable transition plan to move open net-pen aquaculture out of provincial waters, with support for workers at existing open net-pen sites
2. Fast-track support for shellfish, seaweed, and closed-containment alternatives, with a focus on local ownership and habitat restoration where possible
 - “Right-size” Nova Scotia's lease and licensing system to ensure that small-scale and low-impact projects do not face the same bureaucratic and financial barriers as larger, more environmentally damaging proposals
 - Provide technical, financial, and administrative support to coastal entrepreneurs looking to develop low-impact aquaculture projects
 - Invest in basic science, market research, and key extension services to support the development of shellfish and seaweed industries
 - Incentivize land-based, closed containment finfish aquaculture systems that provide community-based jobs and revitalize coastal infrastructure



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

- The Government of Canada has committed to transitioning open net-pens in the waters off British Columbia, but expansion has been allowed to occur in Atlantic Canada.
- Open net-pen aquaculture does not have the support of Nova Scotians, clear via overwhelming opposition to Cermaq-Canada expansion plans in 2019-2020.
- Open net-pens threaten local bays with the build-up of feces and other waste, leading to oxygen depletion and the pollution of sensitive ecosystems at sea and onshore.
- Wild Atlantic salmon are facing extirpation in some parts of Nova Scotia, and remain threatened by sea lice, disease transfer, and introgression – the interbreeding of wild and farmed salmon – problems associated across the open net-pen industry.
- Open net-pen operations can impact the viability of lobster fishing at a localized scale, resulting in reduced catch rates in some cases and a loss of traditional fishing territory.
- Nova Scotia lags well behind its Atlantic neighbours in shellfish development; Prince Edward Island produces more than a 15x value in mussels, and New Brunswick produces more than a 6x value in oysters, despite Nova Scotia's longer coastline.
- Closed-containment finfish products are consuming a growing global market share each year, with developments in more than 20 countries around the world.

CONTACT:

Simon Ryder-Burbidge, Marine Campaign Coordinator

Email: sryderburbidge@ecologyaction.ca