

A HISTORY of APES (The Association for the Preservation of the Eastern Shore)

Protecting the Pristine Harbours of the Eastern Shore of Nova Scotia

In January 2012 a few people happened to see a small notice in the Halifax paper that said there would be a public meeting as required by the Fisheries Act to present 3 applications for finfish licenses on the Eastern Shore. Word must have got out as it does in our communities because over 300 people crammed into a small community hall to hear presentations from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the applicant a subsidiary of a Scottish Salmon Farming Company Loch Duarte. It seems these big fish farm companies move around the world when they have ruined their own harbours. Government officials and industry representatives took up the lions' share of the time presenting their case and there was very little time at the end to hear the communities concerns and questions many of which were not answered. Despite reassurances given that this would not be the only "consultation" meeting with the community there never was any further consultation meetings with the government and industry. In our regulations the government is both the regulator and promoter of this industry - this we see as a huge conflict of interest. We left the meeting knowing that not one application for a finfish farm had ever been turned down in our province. Yes - they say Nova Scotia is open for business at any cost.

Many people who came to the meeting were lobster fishers who have sustained our small communities for generations. We were concerned about the potential negative impacts of fish feedlots on the backbone industries of our communities - our local lobster and tourism operations. We were concerned about the impact of this industry on the slow but growing recovery of our wild salmon populations that was being led by some dedicated volunteers. We were concerned about the

impact of this industry on the marine and terrestrial flora and fauna of our many beautiful wild islands that local people have used and protected for generations. And we were concerned about the lack of opportunity for citizen input and true public consultation in this process. We thought it prudent that a precautionary approach be taken when introducing an industry with such widely known deleterious effects. The licensing process was void of openness, transparency and accountability and there was no trust between government and community because of many past experiences.

So a few leaders of our community got the ball rolling to call a community meeting of our own and to do our research. We took our participation in the licensing process seriously.

Thus APES was reborn as an organization that would organize our community. At the first meeting there were form letters that people could sign and send or could use as a template to create their own letters to both provincial and federal politicians who were involved in the licensing process. Out of this meeting we called on the provincial government to establish a 3 year moratorium on open pen finfish farms until independent and objective science and economic analysis could show that there would be no harm to existing industries and the coastal and estuarine environments. A couple of people took on the big responsibility of responding to the companies' environmental assessment that had to be presented for a license to be granted. We learned that the environmental assessments that had been submitted to the government by the company were carbon copies of the ones that were presented for St. Marys and Jordan Bay on the south shore and site specific information was missing. The communities' detailed response took hours and hours of work and included scientific facts and traditional knowledge. This response was submitted to the Federal government but was completely ignored when the government changed legislation and cancelled this part of the licensing process. Legislative avenues for community input were being shut down.

At subsequent meetings we heard from other communities in our province about their lived experiences with fish feedlots. They had lived with polluted harbours and the displacement of lobster fishers in their communities. Their impassioned presentations motivated more and more people to get involved. We also heard from scientists such as Inka Milewski, a biologist from New Brunswick the home province of the infamous Cooke Aquaculture who spoke about the impact of waste on the ocean floor creating dead zones. We heard from Susanna Fuller a marine scientist from the Ecology Action Centre who said that ocean based fish farms create less jobs per \$1 of investment than any other ocean based industry. We heard from members of the Atlantic Salmon Federation who were concerned about the protection and recovery of wild salmon. Later on we heard from and worked with a scientist from the west coast of Canada ; Alexandra Morton, who has worked for years to publicize the negative impacts of these feedlots on the waters of British Columbia, especially the impacts on wild salmon. When Alexandra Morton was visiting we purchased salmon at local stores and then sent them away for testing at a lab where our suspicions of sea lice and disease were confirmed. We submitted an application to the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency to find out the track record of the applicant Loch Duarte. The record of pesticide use, disease outbreaks and escapes from their feedlots in Scotland were horrendous and made us very concerned since the company had reassured us that their operations were so much "greener" than other companies.

Hundreds of people continued to attend meetings, get informed, write letters to and meet with local politicians to raise their concerns. There were regular letters to the editor in the paper and this helped bring the debate to the broader community. People from the community were involved and relentless. We passed the hat at meetings to pay for a roadside campaign of billboards, to pay for a big billboard in Halifax which was to let city dwellers know about our issue as we felt strongly that this was not just a rural issue. This money also paid for a website which contained research and scientific information and promoted events that were happening and told people how to get involved. The roadside sign campaign was particularly useful as anyone who drove down the eastern shore knew where the community stood on this issue. We knew this campaign was effective when the opposition started vandalizing the signs. Petitions were circulated, signed and

sent to politicians and a door to door campaign took place in every harbour to allow us to talk to every resident and to say that 93 percent of people in our communities were opposed to fish feedlots in our harbours. A few of the teachers in the area brought these discussions to the classroom (despite not being part of the curriculum) and we found that when we were talking to people at the door it was often the children who had done the education of their parents. One of our members was a school bus driver and the kids on her bus knew all about fish farms. Over 9,000 people signed an electronic petition that pinged into the phones of provincial politicians.

We joined a provincial organization (Nova Scotia Coalition for Aquaculture Reform) that was made up of over 100 organizations who were opposed to marine based fish farms and we had several press conferences to let the public and politicians know about the harm this industry caused. We joined a provincial group (Coastal Community Advocates) a group of community organizations that opposed this method of fish production and with them we planned joint actions and produced a fact sheet that could be handed out at public events.

When we viewed Silver Donald Camerons' documentary film Salmon Wars which had followed the struggle of several communities around the issue of fish feedlots we knew that people in the community needed to see it. We set up showings in every little church hall on the shore. These showings made a profound impact on people and it allowed us to have discussions with smaller groups of people.

One of our active tourism operators on the shore wrote and offered provincial and federal politicians a boat ride in the harbour where he lived to show them the proposed sites and the pristine waters and islands that would be destroyed by these applications. One day while we were taking the then provincial fisheries minister out he learned upon his return how people felt about these applications when they surrounded him with a flotilla of boats displaying their sentiments on big signs. Then when he got off the boat he was slowed down in attending a

meeting by a road block of fishers and community members who blocked his exit. He got an earful even from the quietest of fishers.

A few local artists were involved in a campaign whereby people could put their messages to the provincial government on pre-formed fish cut outs that they could paint and decorate. Pictures of these fish were put on postcards that were directed at the government with a space where people could write their own messages. We took these beautiful fish hangings to farmers markets and other public meetings where we could ask people to sign and send their postcards. The visual effect of these works of art drew people in. Out of this came a boycott campaign where we would hand out information to people at local grocery stores and ask them to sign our petitions. We were happy to find out that there was a growing consciousness about not only the environmental harms of this industry but the unhealthiness of the product. Many people told us they would not eat farmed salmon. And people learned that it is the theft of small fish from developing nations that is used in the feed to produce farmed salmon -a created need - for the North American market. Unfortunately in most stores there is no labelling of fish so people do not know if they are eating farmed and diseased fish or now genetically modified fish. We were shocked in January 2013 when the Canadian Food and Inspection Agency allowed the sale of diseased fish as they said it did not harm humans. At one store location where we were handing out information because there was a promotion of farmed salmon the police were called to take us off the property but the promotion that was supposed to take place at other stores in the future was cancelled. At one Oceans forum at Dalhousie university forum where we were handing out literature to the attendees several industry participants accused us of being funded by big U.S. environmental groups and we had to laugh as all of our work was funded by individual contributions.

During this time one license application was withdrawn by the applicant and one application was rejected by the Federal government because of its closeness to a recovering wild salmon river. And during this time there was a disastrous incident in which almost the entire stock of salmon at the Owl's Head site (where a farm

already existed on the Eastern Shore) froze, starved and died and had to be taken to a rendering plant. When our spokesperson made a public statement about this incident she was threatened with a lawsuit by the company. Still there was one more site that had been approved for development.

We had several protests at the provincial legislature. And we staged another protest at a federal hearing about potential changes to the Federal Aquaculture Act. These hearings were by invite only and it was only after we showed up to protest that we were invited in to participate. We handed out leaflets at a provincial NDP convention (the government in power at the time) There was discussion at this convention about the issue because we got some allies to submit a resolution to support the call for a moratorium. Our friends told us the meeting room was stacked when it came time for the vote so the resolution was defeated. But we believe that it was all of the above actions that led the provincial government to call for a public inquiry whereby two experts were to conduct public hearings with the purpose of creating "a world class regulatory system" on aquaculture. It was the governments' way of getting this issue off the table prior to an election campaign. However both provincial members of the legislature on the Eastern Shore were defeated in the election.

The process that was set up to review the Aquaculture Regulations in the province was inclusive, thorough and open and we as communities finally felt heard. We participated at public meetings, by making submissions and working on submissions with other communities and one of our members sat on the Advisory Committee that made recommendations to the final draft report. The report recognized that a regulatory framework is much more than a set of rules and also includes such things as attitude. The report stated that the present provincial governments "attitude assumes that the concerns held by members of the public and local communities especially about the environmental impact are overstated and unsubstantiated." The report further stated that "the attitude that informs regulation must take the concerns of those who live in coastal communities seriously and at face value."

We (APES) however were under no illusions that the proposed regulations would be fully adopted or enforced and they weren't. And we were under no illusions that the industry recognizes the problems that communities have identified and verified by the report. The industry at present is self-regulating. The recent Federal Environment Commissioners report was scathing in its critique of the Federal governments' role in regulation. It states that there is a failure to complete risk assessments for disease and a failure to use the precautionary approach with regards to finfish farms. It goes on to state that the department does not define limits on the amount of drugs or pesticides used or to confirm the accuracy of information self-reported by the companies. It does not set national standards for the quality and maintenance of equipment such as nets and anchoring systems. And it does not sufficiently report disease outbreaks.

APES remains vigilant, watching for developments on our shore and around the world. We know that in many countries there is a move to get feedlots out of the water and onto the land. And in Norway one of the leading fish farm producers they are now starting to charge a very large fee for leases in the water. Here there is only a minimal charge. Recently in Washington a fish farm was shut down because of a large escape jeopardizing wild salmon. In British Columbia there is a high level of commitment to a boycott of farmed fish and native people are using their rights to occupy fish farms.

We will continue to inform and mobilize our communities to keep open pen fish farms out of our harbours. This feedlot method of food production in our pristine waters has too great of an environmental and social cost and little economic benefit. We will continue to tell our story and to learn from others. We continue to research and grow with the wealth of traditional knowledge that exists in our communities. We are interested in development on our shore that is good for our communities. We invited the Nature Trust to one of our meetings and declared our support for the 100 Wild Islands Campaign on our shore. We will be active participants in the upcoming discussions on the proposed Area of Interest on our shore for a Marine Protected Area. Communities need to lead any discussion on development. We are the stewards of the land and water where we live and we wish to continue this responsibility.

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For the

Association for the Preservation of the Eastern Shore