

CAIA - CKNW Ruth Salmon Interview Transcript

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Anna: Well this is sure to add to the debate over fish farming in British Columbia. A new report by the department of fisheries and oceans says Canada's aquaculture industry generates \$2.1 billion each year, and contributes thousands of jobs to locals in coastal and rural communities. The fish farming report today provides estimates on the industry's economic prowess, and says that production quadrupled between 1990 and 2006. Some BC natives are among groups concerned that fish farming is to blame for the collapse of commercial fisheries in the province. Ruth Salmon with the Canadian Aquaculture Industry Alliance joins us now to offer some insight on this. Welcome to the program, Ruth.

Ruth: Hi Anna, thanks for having me.

Anna: Well, give us an idea of how Canada's fish farming industry actually measures up against fish farming industries in other countries.

Ruth: Okay, that's a good question. We're very excited, first of all, about the report today that was issued. It shows that our industry is economically and socially sustainable, and really providing a significant contribution to Canada's economy – now at \$2.1 billion. But when you compare us to other countries, frankly we're not doing that well. We're only 0.2 percent of global production, so really that's very small. Now when it comes to fish farming as salmon farming, we're fourth in the world, we're fourth in terms of production. But when you look at all the other aquaculture including shellfish and other things, we're really very small and we could be so much more. So this is a great study. We're very pleased that we're contributing so much to the economy. But there is so much more we could do.

Anna: I want to bring in the perspective of the first nations members. Bob Chamberlain of the BC Indian Chiefs is absolutely incensed by the DFO and he is among the first nations members in BC who are trying to have a class action law suit certified against the Federal and Provincial governments. The group is saying they are worried about the environmental impacts of aquaculture. And I'd like to play Bob Chamberlain right now.

Bob: I just can't believe the DFO turns their back on wild salmon the way they do. Both in terms of salmon enhancement and mono-trade – everything to do with wild salmon. And yet, if they put the same resources to wild salmon as they do to propping up or supporting the aquaculture industry, I think the wild salmon would do much better.

Anna: Ruth, how do you respond to that?

Ruth: I know that aquaculture is a passionate debate. But just from the industry's perspective, we want to see wild salmon protected and enhanced as well. But I think focusing on Salmon farms as the sole reason for the wild salmon declines and recommending our removal as Bob Chamberlain is doing is really misguided because there are a number of factors that are influencing wild salmon. Scientists are

looking at the affects of climate change, rising water temperatures, urbanization, and habitat loss. So to bring it down to one issue and bring it down to salmon farming is really not appropriate.

Anna: Well certainly opponents of salmon farming have pointed to evidence of unclean and unsanitary conditions for the salmon. If fish that are living in those fish pens escape, they can sometimes compromise the indigenous environment, and thereby hurt the habitat of the fish who would be living there naturally. What do you think about those sorts of facts?

Ruth: You know there are a number of different issues that our opponents raise. But quite honestly, a lot of it is based on misinformation because farming seafood is sustainable. Our industry is a very efficient model for growing food. We lead the world in a number of areas when it comes to environmental sustainability, and I will just give you a few examples. In terms of feed efficiency, we are leading the world in replacing fish proteins in oils in fish diets with vegetable based proteins in oils. Our aquaculture sites are subjected to strict environment review, and they can only be situated where the conditions are optimal for both fish health and environment sustainability, despite what our opponents say. In fact, Anna, there are many more environment safeguards in place to regulate aquaculture than for land-based farming. So, our seafood is hormone free. We have the lowest use of antibiotics in animal food production. In carbon footprint, aquaculture leads the way. So, there are a number of things that I could raise to really bring out the facts and it's not just an emotional debate.

Anna: Aright Ruth Salmon, we will have to leave it there for now. Thank you so much for your time this evening.

Ruth: Thank you for having me on the show.

Anna: Ruth Salmon is speaking for Canadian Aquaculture Industry Alliance.