



NEWSLETTER

Aboriginal Aquaculture Association

December 2020

www.aboriginalaquaculture.com

COVID-19 & Shellfish Aquaculture

How to weather & adjust to the new reality

Back in March of this year, no one could have anticipated the far ranging consequences caused by the global response to the current pandemic. Of the many industry sectors affected by this dangerous virus, the worst economic impacts have been felt the hardest by North America's retail, transportation and travel industries but, without any doubt, the most exposed industry here in BC and around the world to have been impacted by Covid-19, has been the restaurant sector and there is no relief in sight for the immediate future.

This means that BC's shellfish growers, responsible for producing the best farmed shellfish anywhere, are having great difficulty in finding buyers and new markets to take their product as countless BC restaurants are severely limiting their orders and for many, have closed their doors. Making this worst is the fact that countries from around the world that import BC farmed shellfish are also curtailing their purchases causing prices to drop. Many BC shellfish growers have had to reduce their labour force (some by 75%), decrease their production and lose cash flow making it difficult to keep paying employees, pay bills and purchase seed for next year's planting season.

Amid all the economic & market mayhem, there is a very small silver lining in that shellfish, if left on the beach, in nets or in trays (because they aren't being harvested) simply continue to grow and generally increase in value. Farmed shellfish does not suffer the reality of spoilage or refrigeration costs as does most other forms of protein however the impact on cash flow is real and can cause a shellfish farm business to fail.

There is not much that can be done to restore the restaurant industry before a vaccine is found so one must be innovative and resilient in addressing the downturn. Many shellfish growers that have been exporting the bulk of their product to the US or overseas have turned to expanding their local market presence even more as well as value adding their farmed shellfish product. We are seeing increased marketing efforts through social media platforms by many shellfish companies as well as web based ordering & delivery of farmed shellfish; this is by no means

replacing the traditional sales channels, but it is a hopeful sign that industry is adapting, albeit slowly. This is where it pays to "not have all of one's eggs in one basket" so to speak where developing more regional and diverse markets within the retail food sector is vital to shellfish growers' survival in BC.

Like all industries, aquaculture workers are vulnerable to direct exposure through potential contact with people that have become infected with the virus. A recent COVID-19 case at an aquaculture farm on the northern West Coast of Vancouver Island shows how easily it can affect operations and onsite technicians not to mention put a community in harm's way. Social distancing, awareness of symptoms and self-isolation discipline are all part of the solution in mitigating COVID's impact on aquaculture farm sites.

The local, provincial, and federal governments recognize the stress caused by COVID to the aquaculture sector and have created protocols for improved safety on aquaculture farms. Several funding and economic relief programs have also been created for the aquaculture sector, have a look and call us if you require support in accessing these programs and want guidance in navigating your aquaculture business during this COVID-19 pandemic response period. Stay safe and well, this too shall pass.

Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy: <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/subsidy/emergency-wage-subsidy.html>

Farm Credit Canada: <https://www.fcc-fac.ca/en/covid-19/program-details.html>

Canadian Seafood Stabilization Fund: <https://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/fisheries-peches/initiatives/stabilization-fund-fonds-stabilisation/index-eng.html>

Small & medium size Indigenous Business Support: <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1588079295625/1588079326171>

Regional Relief & Recovery Fund: <https://www.wd-deo.gc.ca/eng/20059.asp>

Essential Services Contingency Reserve: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-services-procurement/services/escr.html>

First Nation Success

Support from the Aquaculture Development Source Fund

First Nation PICFI ADS project updates

In 2019, the We Wai Kai First Nation and the Toquaht Nation received PICFI Aquaculture Development Source funding to support expansion of their existing aquaculture enterprises; Barkley Sound Shellfish of the Toquaht Nation acquired a commercial vessel refitted for aquaculture operations allowing them to further expand their scallop and oyster aquaculture production while the We Wai Kai introduced over 500,000 scallop seed onto their scallop farm site in Sutil Channel. This was accomplished with support from the federal PICFI ADS fund as well as with support from the BC Ministry of Agriculture. The AAA was instrumental in facilitating the funding application as well as the project business cases that saw a successful outcome in the Nations request for funding support. Both projects created new aboriginal employment positions in aquaculture as well as help increase production capacity that will ensure long-term success and profitability for those First Nations in shellfish aquaculture.

The We Wai Kai Nation's shellfish farm was seeded in early spring of this year with 20mm seed produced by Island Scallops and, the scallops are expected to reach market size and be ready to harvest by the fall of 2021. As of now, the scallops have reached an average size of 70mm-80mm and survival rates are very good. This is an important project for the Nation as it seeks to restore the community's faith in sustainable scallop aquaculture after suffering a considerable financial blow in 2015 & 2016 due to the near complete loss of mature scallops. With the high-quality seed planted on their farm site, We Wai Kai's ongoing net & line maintenance and, with diligent tracking of growth and survival rates, the We Wai Kai First Nation seeks to re-established itself as a leading producer of sustainably farmed Pacific Scallops.



Engagement on Aquaculture Initiatives

Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) has indicated they plan to engage on a number of aquaculture initiatives. Their current consultation priority over the next few months will be focused on conditions of license renewals. Marine finfish aquaculture licenses expire in June 2022 and the review is part of the scheduled renewal processes. Consultation on this initiative will take place between October 2020 and December 2021. Shellfish aquaculture licenses, which expire in May 2025, have undergone a similar process. Shellfish conditions of license will be amended to address concerns related to traceability and the conservation and protection of fish.

DFO is also planning to engage;

- On the development and implementation of Area Based Management approach and pilot areas in B.C. Consultation timeline for this is October 2020 – March 2021 and;
- To develop a plan to transition open net-pen aquaculture in B.C. by 2025. Starting in April 2021

Work is also underway on the development of a Federal Aquaculture Act “that respects federal, provincial, and territorial jurisdictions, fosters national consistency, improves clarity for the sector, enhances environmental protection, and helps sustainably grow the industry for the benefit of Indigenous and rural communities”. As the aquaculture industry continues to grow DFO is developing proposed legislation designed to reflect the distinct context and requirements associated with aquaculture management.

Based on input received the proposed Aquaculture Act is expected to:

- define the term aquaculture in legislation
- recognize the need for clarity and stability for responsible economic growth of the aquaculture sector
- ensure environmental protections enshrined in the Fisheries Act are included and specific to aquaculture
- develop enforcement mechanisms specific to aquaculture
- respect provincial and territorial jurisdictions
- respect roles and responsibilities articulated in treaties and other rights reconciliation arrangements

DFO is seeking feedback and has developed a discussion document to further guide this process. The purpose of this discussion paper is to gather further advice and direction on provisions that DFO could address in a new Aquaculture Act. It is designed to outline key elements and authorities that DFO is proposing as part of the proposed federal Aquaculture Act. Many of these elements would

be replicated from relevant sections of the Fisheries Act and adapted for an aquaculture context, while some may be purpose-built for the proposed Act. This paper poses a series of questions on public policy issues to help further refine the legislative proposal. A link to the discussion paper https://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/aquaculture/act-loi/doc/Aquaculture-Act-Discussion-Paper-2020_en.pdf The deadline to provide feedback is currently January 15, 2021.

It is not known if the consultation/engagement schedule for these DFO initiatives will be extended given the challenges COVID 19 has presented.

DFO-Shellfish-AMAC-Update

The fall meeting of the DFO Shellfish Aquaculture Management Advisory Committee (AMAC) was held virtually on October 28, 2020. The Committee meets twice a year to discuss and make recommendations to the Department on policy, planning and operational matters related to aquaculture management.

The SF-AMAC provides an opportunity to network and learn from those in the industry and others. The committee brings together governments, industry and other shellfish aquaculture stakeholders to provide valuable feedback on upcoming policies and regulations affecting shellfish aquaculture.

During the recent nomination process the AAA encouraged First Nations to put their names forward to participate and we are pleased to report a number of First Nation people were appointed to the AMAC. The AAA was very pleased to welcome these First Nation members to the committee, as First Nation leaders best understand the needs of their communities.

The SF-AMAC is strictly an advisory board and not a consultation body- Rights and Title discussions are conducted government to government between the First Nations and government.

Other promising news at the SF-AMAC meeting from Allison Webb, Director Aquaculture Management Division is that the Department is hoping to commit resources for species diversification in particular sea cucumber. Work would be undertaking similar to other fisheries frameworks. We'll keep you posted on any updates. The AAA posts meeting materials on the AAA website.

New Provincial Grant Program Announced

The Agritech Grant Program provides one-time funding to B.C.-based agritech or technology companies, agriculture producers or agrifood companies, including aquaculture. The funding supports the increase of domestic food production and stimulates the development and testing of technologies.

The Agritech Grant program will invest up to \$3 million to help B.C. agritech, agriculture and technology companies scale up, expand and develop technologies to help increase sustainable and regenerative food production in B.C.

Grants of up to \$500,000 are available to B.C. based companies. Applications are open until February 12, 2021.

More information can be found on the Prov. Government website: <http://www.gov.bc.ca/agritechgrant>



The AAA

Board of Directors & Staff

Wish You and Your Family a

Merry Christmas

and a

Happy and Healthy New Year

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