

## Offshore aquaculture the wave of the future

### Lobbying: N.B. minister, counterparts seek long-term strategy

Rob Linke  
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OTTAWA - The inner bays of Charlotte County may have nearly all the aquaculture sites they can handle, but provincial Agriculture and Aquaculture Minister Ronald Ouellette is looking to expand the industry with sites farther offshore as he lobbies the federal government.

Ouellette and his counterparts from Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland and Labrador met several federal cabinet ministers Wednesday and Thursday to push for a long-term strategy to boost investment, production and employment in the industry.

"The capacity to expand close to shore is limited," Ouellette told a Parliament Hill news conference Thursday. "We're looking farther offshore for sites that could work for us."

Offshore sites pose different challenges, including greater risk of damage from rough seas. A private firm has begun assessing the challenges and possible solutions, as well as potential sites, in the Bay of Fundy, said provincial officials.

A conference on offshore aquaculture will also be held in St. Andrews later this month.

Aquaculture, a mainstay of the Charlotte County economy, employs 4,500 people in New Brunswick and generated \$230 million in output last year.

Only British Columbia has a larger aquaculture industry in Canada.

Farmed salmon has become the leading agrifood commodity produced in the province.

The premier's task force on self-sufficiency earlier this year identified aquaculture as one of the sectors with the most growth potential in New Brunswick.

"We feel we are on the fringe of a spectacular development, one that would provide opportunities for wealth and job creation in the rural regions," said Ouellette.

Nationally, the industry has the potential to produce \$2.8 billion worth of product and employ 47,000 Canadians by 2015, he said.

The provincial ministers are looking for Ottawa to invest in the industry and to streamline or harmonize environmental and licensing approvals for sites.

In New Brunswick, up to 10 federal and provincial agencies have to sign off on a site approval, said an official. The industry wants that process to become as timely and predictable as possible without compromising environmental protection, said an official.

The ministers said it is too early in the discussions to put a dollar figure on federal funding.

"We're looking for sustainability," said Ouellette. "The provinces and industry have made a lot of efforts. We're at a stage now where we need the federal government involved to move things forward.

"Chile and Norway took the techniques we had developed and made their industries bigger because they had their governments involved."

Veterans Affairs Minister Greg Thompson, the regional minister for New Brunswick, happens to have most of the province's aquaculture industry in

his riding.

Thompson, who had dinner with the provincial ministers and federal Fisheries Minister Loyola Hearn Wednesday night, said Ottawa agrees the industry has the potential for substantial growth.

He described Hearn, who was not made available for comment, as "optimistic" about the industry and the role the federal government could play.

"We want to see growth in the industry, but not uncontrolled growth," said Thompson. "There has to be a balance and co-existence with the traditional fishery."

New Brunswick was an early entrant in the aquaculture industry but has struggled for several reasons.

In recent years, its challenges include diseases that killed millions of fish and fierce competition from Norway and Chile.

There's also been bad press that exaggerated the health risk of eating too much salmon, which has been balanced by other news about the heart-health benefits of salmon's Omega 3 fatty acids.

Now, after a wave of consolidation that created a handful of key players, the prediction that more and more of the world will rely on aquaculture is an enticing prospect.

Some forecasts envision more than half of the world's population relying on aquaculture products for a significant source of their protein intake by 2050, said Prince Edward Island Aquaculture Minister Allan Campbell.

Thompson said Hearn is well aware of the industry's potential from having witnessed its growth in Newfoundland, partly thanks to investments made

by New Brunswick-based firms.

The industry in Newfoundland grew 60 per cent between 2005 and 2006, from \$33.5 million in product to \$53.5 million, said Newfoundland Aquaculture Minister Tom Rideout.

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