FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

First Nation Wild Salmon Alliance (FNWSA)

BC Salmon Farmers Muddy the Waters on Sea Lice

BC Salmon Farmers Release DFO Report on Sea Lice on Eve of 3rd Discovery Islands Decision

2023-01-25: Vancouver/ Traditional unceded territories of the xwməθkwəy̓ əm (MUSQUEAM), Sḵwx̱ wú7mesh (SQUAMISH) and səlilwətaɬ (TSLEIL-WAUTUTH) First Nations:

The BC Salmon Farmers Association (BCSFA) released an internal DFO report that directly contradicts the findings of two decades of published peer-reviewed research by Canada's major universities. This release comes days before Minister of Fisheries Joyce Murray is scheduled to make a decision whether to allow industrial salmon farms to operate in the Discovery Islands.

The report concludes that salmon farms are not a statistically significant cause of the damaging sea lice infections reported on wild salmon smolts. How could this internal DFO reach a conclusion that conflicts with decades of peer-reviewed research? The devil is in the details.

Industry data: DFO relied exclusively on salmon farm industry data – only *Mainstream Biological Consulting*[1] data, prepared under contract to the *BC Salmon Farmers Association* is used.

Biased data: Industry under-reports their lice by up to 50% at times when their count is audited by DFO – which is why industry data on sea lice on wild salmon never aligns with research from Canada's universities and research stations.[2]

Merged data: They indiscriminately totalled the sea lice per salmon farm, in four areas of BC; then, based on that average, estimated the number of larval lice being released and compared that to industry data on sea lice infestation of salmon smolts in each of those regions – and so justify their false conclusion that lice on farms does not significantly lead to more lice on wild salmon.

The maps on pp 34-35 of the DFO report show the wild salmon lice counts include near and distant farms. This data was then lumped into a single average – failing to consider that many fish were sampled before they were even exposed to the farms.

Academic researchers count sea lice on salmon before, near, and past the farms – making it clear wild salmon smolts don't get infected until they are exposed to an active salmon farm. Also, research is reveals big declines in sea lice in the Discovery Islands when the farms are inactive.

Missing data: Why wasn't the Muchalat Inlet data available? This is the only region in the world where data was taken prior to arrival of the farms (2003 paper by DFO's Brent Hargreaves).[3]

Misleading: It is irrelevant if farms produce fewer larval sea lice during the out-migration, if the production of larval sea lice remains above the threshold that harms juvenile salmon.

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1 **Mainstream Biological Consulting:** https://www.mainstreambio.ca/

2 **Bias in self-reported parasite data from the salmon farming industry**, Goodwin et al., 2020-09-07 https://doi.org/10.1002/eap.2226

3 Hargreaves NB, D Herriot, V Palermo (2004). **Pink Salmon Action Plan: Abundance and distribution of juvenile salmon and other fish caught in the Broughton Archipelago, Knight Inlet and Muchalat Inlet, B.C. in 2003.** PSARC Working Paper H2004-02.