acffa Atlantic Canada Fish Farmers Association

Fact Sheet on Infectious Salmon Anemia (ISA)

March 2012

ISA OVERVIEW

Infectious Salmon Anemia (ISA) is a serious but manageable virus that occurs in nature and can also affect salmon farms. A suspected case of ISA in Nova Scotia in February has sparked media attention and some discussion and confusion in the community.

While all salmon farming companies view ISA as a serious virus, they have lived with and managed ISA for many years. The voluntary effort by Cooke Aquaculture to cull two cages of fish in Nova Scotia after ISA was suspected was a proactive and positive move and a typical effort to manage this virus and keep it from spreading.

The recent confirmation by CFIA of the presence of ISA in three cages in Nova Scotia shows that the surveillance and fish health program is working. Both levels of government and the company are taking the necessary actions to manage the virus and to prevent its spread.

Here are quick facts on ISA:

- ISA is a natural virus, not something created by salmon farming
- ISA can be a serious threat but since we know it is in the environment we have learned how to test for it and manage it
- Although this is not the first case in Nova Scotia, it's the first one the Province has seen in several years; ISA has not been confirmed in New Brunswick since 2006
- The suspected ISA case in Nova Scotia in February shows that fish health monitoring is effective
- The cull of two cages of fish was voluntary and precautionary but the right thing to do as a preventative measure after weighing the risks; a third cage was culled after confirmation and ongoing monitoring and fish sampling will continue on the rest of the farm
- This confirmation of ISA in Nova Scotia is viewed by Cooke Aquaculture as a part of farming on the East Coast – they don't take this virus lightly but are confident it can be managed
- Cooke Aquaculture remains committed to its expansion and development plans in Nova Scotia

For more information, the following Q&A provides answers to some of the most common questions about ISA…

1. What is ISA?

Infectious Salmon Anemia (ISA) is a naturally occurring virus that spreads slowly and is present in wild fish in many parts of the world, including eastern Canada and the United States. While ISA is harmful to salmon, it poses no risks to human health.

2. Is the ISA virus harmful to humans?

No. While ISA is harmful to salmon, it poses no risks to human health.

3. Does ISA pose a threat to fish species other than salmon?

No. Veterinarians and scientists say that ISA poses no known threat to other fish species such as lobster, herring or cod. Although herring and cod can carry the virus, there is no adverse affect.

4. Doesn't the fact that we suspect ISA prove that farming salmon is not safe?

No. Like all farmers we are affected by environmental conditions and the natural presence of parasites, viruses and pathogens. ISA is a virus that spreads slowly and is present in wild fish in many parts of the world, including eastern Canada and the United States. Rigorous testing and monitoring is in place to detect the presence of viruses as quickly as possible. That is what happened in NS in February.

5. What is industry doing to control ISA?

Evidence of ISA has existed in the wild fishery on the east coast for over 100 years. Since 1996 when ISA was first identified on New Brunswick salmon farms, farmers have worked with scientists, veterinarians and government to manage and prevent outbreaks and stop the virus from spreading.

The New Brunswick salmon farming industry responded to the threat of ISA by developing a bay management area system and strict bio-security protocols for all farming, processing and fish transportation operations as well as the designation of wharves for specific activities and guidelines for vessel traffic.

6. How doe salmon farmers manage ISA?

Company veterinarians, biologists and oceanographic specialists and Provincial and Federal veterinarians and regulators provide advice and oversight on our everyday farming practices. Farmers follow innovative farming techniques such as area management, single year stocking, crop rotation, fallowing of farms between crops and strict bio-security protocols to keep fish healthy until they are ready for harvest. If ISA is suspected they take aggressive measures like culling a cage as a preventative measure.

7. What does this ISA virus detection mean for the public? Are the fish in the area at risk?

ISA is a naturally occurring virus that exists in the wild fishery and can also affect salmon farms. While it is harmful to salmon, ISA poses no risk to humans or to other species such as lobster, herring and cod. The ongoing testing and surveillance work of the CFIA and the provincial regulators make sure any new evidence of the virus is detected immediately and proactive measures are taken to prevent spread.

8. **What does this ISA virus detection and the loss of two cages of fish mean for Cooke and its plans for investment in NS?**

While this is an unfortunate event, it is part of the farming business and Cooke has managed through many challenges like ISA over the years while remaining a successful Atlantic Canadian business. The company has strategically diversified in terms of geography, products and markets and is therefore in a strong position to deal with business and farming challenges. We remain committed to our NS expansion plans.

9. **Why is Salmon Farming Important to NS and to Atlantic Canada for that matter?**

With the consolidation of traditional agribusinesses and their exodus from Atlantic Canada, Aquaculture has become a key food-producing sector. Salmon farming has become critical to the social and economic fabric of rural Atlantic Canada. We already provide thousands of good direct and indirect jobs and have the capacity to do so much more. We not only offer high quality, healthy and nutritious food for the Canadian and US marketplace, we offer stability to a region that has been hard hit by economic decline and job losses. Aquaculture is building on the region's marine and agriculture heritage and is becoming the new 'traditional' food sector.