

Norwegian-owned fish farms target of chiefs' hunger strike

By Judith Lavoie, Times Colonist
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First Nations chiefs are planning a 29-hour hunger strike leading up to the Olympic hockey game between Canada and Norway Tuesday, to protest Norwegian-owned fish farms.

Members of the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs are fasting to support the Musgamagw Tsawataineuk Tribal Council's opposition to fish-farm tenures in the Broughton Archipelago.

"The 29-hour fast reflects the 29 fish-farm tenures in our territories," said Chief Bob Chamberlin, chairman of the Tribal Council.

Marine Harvest and Cermaq, which own the tenures in Musgamagw Tsawataineuk territory, both have Norwegian parent companies.

In addition to union president Grand Chief Stewart Phillip and vice-president Chief Willie Charlie, at least a dozen other hereditary and elected chiefs are expected to join the fast, which starts 5 a.m. tomorrow at the union office in Vancouver, Chamberlin said.

Fasts will also be held in communities around the Broughton Archipelago, said Chamberlin, who has already been approached by members of the Norwegian media.

"It is sad we have to turn to the international community to have our territory looked after, but we have turned to the provincial and federal governments to no avail," he said.

Tribal council and Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs members have invited King Harald V of Norway to meet with them while he is at the Olympic Games.

Earlier this month, a spokesman for the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Ottawa said King Harald will be in Vancouver to watch athletes perform and would not meet with any special-interest groups.

Chamberlin, who visited Norway last year, said in a letter to King Harald that the situation is urgent.

"All we ask for is that the river system and inlets which produce our wild salmon that have sustained the Musgamagw Tsawataineuk people since the beginning of time be shown the very same respect the Norwegian government demonstrated in safeguarding the wild salmon of Norway," the letter says.

Another letter to King Harald, signed by 170 people, will be delivered to the Royal Norwegian Consulate in Vancouver Tuesday by the Wilderness Tourism Association of B.C., Pure Salmon Campaign and Wild Salmon Circle.

"We hope Your Royal Highness can persuade Norwegian companies to clean up their act, move farms out of the path of migrating wild salmon and introduce closed containment systems to protect wild fish from sea lice, mass escapes and infectious diseases," the letter said.

At the hockey game, supporters dressed as bears and wild salmon will greet Norwegian fans and offer gifts of wild salmon.

Clare Backman, Marine Harvest Canada director of environmental relations, said standards in the Broughton Archipelago are as high as in Norway, and the company is in compliance with all local regulations.

Standards are even higher than prescribed when it comes to dealing with sea lice, disease or organic waste control, he said.

Backman said he is concerned the company has not been able to work out concerns with groups such as the Musgamagw Tsawataineuk.

Marine Harvest farms are in the territories of 20 First Nations, he said, adding the company has protocol agreements with seven and is in discussions with another five.