



The Honourable Joanne Thompson

Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario

July 30, 2025

RE: Request for Public Retraction of 2023 DFO Sea Lice Report

Dear Minister Thompson,

We respectfully request that Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) publicly retract its January 2023 Science Response Report #2022/045,¹ which concluded there is no significant association between parasitic sea lice on wild juvenile salmon and lice from nearby salmon farms.

On June 5, 2025, a peer-reviewed paper² was published in *Aquaculture Environment Interactions* co-authored by six of the same scientists that led the 2023 DFO report. In contrast to the 2023 report, the paper concluded there was a significant relationship between lice levels on salmon farms and infestations on wild juvenile salmon. This 2025 paper used the same core dataset as the 2023 report, added two more years of data, and applied more advanced

¹ https://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/csas-sccs/Publications/ScR-RS/2022/2022_045-eng.html

² <https://www.int-res.com/abstracts/aei/v17/aei00498>

statistical modelling. It is clear the core conclusion of the 2023 DFO report has not stood up to rigorous scientific scrutiny.

The retraction of the 2023 report is critical because it was widely used by aquaculture advocates to assert that salmon farms pose minimal or insignificant risk to B.C. wild salmon, and was immediately cited in public communications to support that narrative. For example:

- The BC Salmon Farmers Association issued a January 2023 media release with the headline: *Government of Canada Science Report Confirms No Statistically Relevant Association Regarding Sea Lice and the Production of Farmed Salmon*.³
- A Business in Vancouver article,⁴ *Sea lice from farmed to wild salmon insignificant: CSAS*, similarly reported the conclusion as scientific fact.

In 2023, the report's conclusions were highly controversial, contradicting a substantial body of independent science linking sea lice from fish farms to wild salmon. In a public letter,⁵ sixteen prominent researchers from Canada and the U.S. criticized its lack of transparency, impartiality, and scientific rigour.

More concerning, the 2023 DFO report was recently used as evidence in a civil claim in the Supreme Court of British Columbia⁶ by the salmon farming company Cermaq against the Attorney General of Canada and Minister of Fisheries (see point 27). The lawsuit is seeking financial compensation due to the removal of salmon farms in the Discovery Islands.

It is important to note that it took over two years for independent parties to access the full dataset used in the 2023 DFO report.⁷ Initial requests produced data files that were heavily redacted, particularly regarding farm stocking numbers. Full disclosure only occurred after a formal complaint was made to the Information Commissioner of Canada. It is worth considering whether the authors, anticipating the eventual release of the full dataset, sought to proactively revisit their analysis in the 2025 paper ahead of any independent review.

The consequences of the flawed 2023 DFO report continue to be far-reaching. It distorted public understanding of the risks posed by open-net pen salmon farms and is now being used in legal

³ <https://www.bcsalmonfarmers.ca/news/government-of-canada-science-report-confirms-no-statistically-relevant-association-regarding-sea-lice-and-the-production-of-farmed-salmon/>

⁴ <https://www.biv.com/news/resources-agriculture/sea-lice-farmed-wild-salmon-insignificant-csas-8270305>

⁵ https://krkosek.eeb.utoronto.ca/files/2023/02/Scientists-critique-of-DFO-CSAS-Response-Report-2022_045.pdf

⁶ <https://watershedwatch.ca/resource/cermaqs-notice-of-civil-claim-in-bcsc-action-against-minister-1-2/>

⁷ <https://watershedwatch.ca/media-releases/controversial-federal-salmon-farm-data-ordered-to-be-released-information-commissioner-of-canada/>

efforts to undermine federal policies intended to protect wild salmon. In light of the updated peer-reviewed science and the troubling context surrounding the original report, we urge you to take the following actions:

1. Publicly retract the conclusions of the 2023 report, and issue a clarification that reflects the findings of the 2025 peer-reviewed study; and
2. Strengthen DFO's Canadian Science Advisory Secretariat (CSAS) processes to ensure full transparency, rigorous independent review, and safeguards against industry influence.

The Government of Canada has made a clear commitment to remove marine salmon farms from B.C. waters by 2029. It must follow through on that promise—and ensure that protecting wild salmon remains the overriding priority in all aquaculture policy decisions.

We look forward to your response to this important issue.

Sincerely,

Stan Proboszcz, Watershed Watch Salmon Society

Dan Lewis, Clayoquot Action

Jesse Zeman, BC Wildlife Federation

Jeffery Young, David Suzuki Foundation

Sydney Dixon, Pacific Wild

Alexandra Morton, Pacific Coast Wild Salmon Society

Lucero Gonzalez, Wilderness Committee

Karen Wristen, Living Oceans Society

Sonia Strobel, Skipper Otto

John Boyle, Wild Salmon Action Team, Vancouver Unitarians

Beatrice Frank, Georgia Strait Alliance

Cc Lisa Settington, National Manager, Canadian Science Advisory Secretariat; Anna Classen, Regional Director General, Pacific Region; Joshua Lindner, Senior B.C. Advisor, Office of the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans