The backbone of life on the coast is threatened by PRV

As we prepared to release our Going Viral report to the media last February, we were having a back and forth about delaying, as stories about an emerging global pandemic were beginning to dominate the news cycle. After stalling for a week, we realized that if we did not act soon, there would be nothing but Covid-19 in the news!

The goal of our study was to establish the presence or absence of PRV on salmon farms in Clayoquot Sound. Samples were collected adjacent to stocked farms and sent to the Atlantic Veterinary College for testing by Dr. Fred Kibenge, one of the world’s leading salmon virologists. Samples from all but one farm tested positive for PRV.

There was an immediate response to the release of Going Viral. Industry and governments have long maintained that PRV is: 1) endemic to BC waters, and 2) harmless to wild salmon. Our samples were tested right down to the level of variant—and we found PRV-1a, which originates in the Pacific. There is nothing but Covid-19 in the news!

So the tune suddenly changed. Cermaq and Creative issued a statement to the Clayoquot Salmon Roundtable, stating that PRV-1a is the ‘BC strain’ they had been referring to all along—diffe rent from the variant—and we found PRV-1a, which originates in the Pacific Ocean—not the Pacific.

The fact is that DFO’s Dr Kristi Miller-Saunders and her team were called in to investigate Creative’s Jaundice back in 2011. She concluded that PRV is the problem. That scientific paper has not yet been published by DFO because Creative’s Jaundice Syndrome problem for sixteen years.

Then they dropped the bomb: “Jaundice Syndrome is a disease of unknown cause that affects farmed Chinook salmon in BC.” Given that Creative has had a jaundice problem since 2004, and they are rearing Pacific Chinook, one would hope that getting to the bottom of the matter would be of utmost urgency in order not to harm wild salmon. With the Department of Fisheries (DFO) sitting at the Roundtable, we would hope they might chime in, or at least express some concern that Creative has done nothing about their Jaundice Syndrome problem for sixteen years.

It appears that the purpose of Cermaq’s new facility might be to protect their own fish stock from the deleterious effects of salmon farming! For example, Cermaq claims the new system will protect their farmed fish from Hazardous Algal Blooms (HABs). Yet the SCCS will continue to pump 65 billion viral particles per hour into the ocean environment—so it will not address one of the biggest known threats to wild salmon.

Our Clayoquot Salmon Investigation (CSI) program has been monitoring the installation of Cermaq’s experimental Semi-Closed Containment System (SCCS) at their Millar Channel site in Ahousaht First Nations territory.

It seems very little will be contained. The system will still be dumping raw sewage into the otherwise pristine waters of Clayoquot Sound. What other farmer dumps sewage directly into water bodies? Furthermore, SCS will continue to pump 65 billion viral particles per hour into the ocean environment—so it will not address one of the biggest known threats to wild salmon.

Get Wild! is the first-of-its-kind wild salmon recommendation program, with the goal of protecting wild salmon by encouraging people to ask for and purchase wild caught salmon only.

During the Covid-19 slowdown we have been busy registering new Get Wild!’ vendors, and now have 25 vendors and allies. A warm welcome to our newest members, The Wickaninnish Inn, The Tofino Ucluelet Culinary Guild, Gaia Grocery and Basic Goodness Pizzeria. We couldn’t be more excited to have you on board!

We would like to thank all of the wild salmon fishermen, Get Wild! food vendors, and the supportive local residents and seasonal visitors that are helping to keep Clayoquot Sound wild! Because of your unwavering dedication to the health of Tofino’s coastlines, we are able to work towards a sustainable wild salmon economy that promotes great long term jobs, healthy wild salmon runs, great food and thriving ecosystems.

—Nicole Holman, Get Wild! Coordinator

Get Wild! is wholly funded by Ocean Oufitters. More info: getwildsalmon.ca