

Speaking Notes for

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The Science, Economics, & Politics of Aquaculture**

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I would like to begin by thanking the organizers for such a well-planned and informative conference. This has been the perfect occasion for aquaculture experts, industry representatives and producers, policy and decision-makers to get together, exchange perspectives and set the stage for the next step in the development of the aquaculture industry in Canada.

I must confess that wrapping-up this conference by summarizing the presentations given by such a broad spectrum of highly qualified experts and speakers is not an easy task. On the other hand it provides me with an enjoyable occasion to have the last kick at the ball.

First I would like to highlight what I believe are the key messages that were delivered during this conference, then I will give my little contribution by providing a vision of the future.

Key messages

The first key message is that science is an essential component of sound decision-making and must be better financed and coordinated.

As we have also seen, science can be subjective and is regularly abused in the communication process. For that reason science is not the end of the process but only one element of the decision-making process.

'Sustainability' and the 'precautionary approach' are essentially buzz words that will have as many definitions as the number of people sitting around the table. Therefore, these notions are useless in the real life of decision-makers because they do not refer to precise standards, precise objectives or precise deliverables. Moreover, debating such notions between participants may increase misunderstanding, each party interpreting the notions differently.

Having said that, what becomes really important is what a community or a society defines as an acceptable or not acceptable level of environmental impact from a specific

human activity. When well defined, this acceptable level can then be transformed into policies, guidelines, codes of practice, regulations or legislation, and should be modified as information accumulates or conditions change.

But to do that properly and to provide confidence to the community that the level of acceptance is appropriate and will provide security for future generations requires good science, a great deal of information exchange and communication, and an obligation by everyone to work together.

What is really needed is risk assessment, risk management and risk communication.

Regarding risk communication, confidence is a two-way process. Legitimacy and acceptance will bring more exchange of information.

The example of Norway speaks for itself. The opposition in the late 80s and early 90s has evolved so that now people are working together. The legitimacy of aquaculture is not a question in Norway.

The second key message is that Canada's share of the aquaculture market is declining.

As an exporter of seafood products, Canada is losing ground.

At the international level, some countries are already experiencing a stabilization of their growth while we are still at the beginning of our potential growth curve.

We also heard that investments by major companies could move elsewhere if conditions for business are not attractive in Canada. Bill Robertson commented that during a strategic planning session between operations managers in Chile and Canada, a statement was made that Canadians would not be quick enough to meet the growth in the market demand in North America, leaving full latitude to Chile to fill the demand.

At the same time, there was a consensus that Canada has the potential to be a world leader in aquaculture because of:

- Biophysical potential
- Expertise and know-how
- Existing strong industrial basis

We urgently need to straighten out the Canadian situation otherwise we will not be able to maintain our competitiveness in the global market.

The third key message is that there is a need for strong national, provincial and regional producer organizations.

These organizations should:

- Develop protocols, codes of practice
- Communicate risks and industrial achievements

- Adequately represent industry's interests

Tor Horsberg commented that the environmentalists' focus on aquaculture has had some positive effects: it has forced the industry to move fast on environmental concerns and to put in place measures that will contribute to making aquaculture a model of sustainable development. Aquaculture is already out-performing other sectors in terms of environmental performance.

There is also consensus that more work is needed to fully address issues like:

- Escapements
- Waste management / carrying capacity
- Fish health and use of therapeutants / pesticides

It is really a question of rolling up our sleeves and moving forward in collaboration with constructive NGO partners like ASF. The key – working together to find solutions instead of debating extreme positions through the media. Extreme positions from either side are not defensible.

I also noted that, overall, environmental performance of the aquaculture sector is viewed by many specialists as enviable and in many aspects better than other sectors.

The fourth key message is that user conflicts for aquatic space is a serious issue. This was clearly brought out by a number of speakers.

My view is that there is an urgent need to establish a conflict resolution mechanism that will function both at the community level and at provincial or national levels. At one time I was convinced that aquaculture zoning was the only way to resolve user conflicts and to provide legitimacy to the aquaculture sector. I now believe that a combination of both initiatives would be the best strategy, the conflict resolution mechanism being the number one priority.

I would like to summarize a few thoughts by re-stating that the three major impediments to aquaculture development in Canada are:

- Access to sites
- Access to clear and transparent rules, processes for site approvals that are reasonable in terms of cost and of time taken, long-term authorizations
- Access to working capital

I heard many times that public policy for aquaculture was missing. This is both wrong and right.

The Federal Aquaculture Development Strategy (FADS) exists and was reaffirmed recently as the Federal Aquaculture Policy when the federal government announced a program of \$75 million for aquaculture.

The real problem is:

- Lack of financial resources to implement FADS
- Lead Federal Agency is not staffed to implement FADS
- Lead Agency does not have an aquaculture policy (FADS within DFO) and operational policies

- Need for a cultural shift within DFO

But all of these require human resources that are willing to assume the challenges of rebuilding the DFO expertise and capacity in aquaculture. We can dream of the good old days in the late seventies when DFO was leading aquaculture development. But a cultural shift will not happen unless aquaculture expertise re-colonizes the department. Some employment opportunities will be created by the \$75 million program. It is important that aquaculture experts consider taking over those challenges to initiate changes from inside the organization.

Having said that, I would like to give you a little note of hope for the future. I would suggest that we now have a few fog lights in the toolbox.

DFO is finally getting back on the job regarding aquaculture. In the last year-and-a-half, much progress has been made.

Current and upcoming initiatives:

- Office of the Commissioner for Aquaculture Development (OCAD)
 - Legal review (step 1 and step 2)
 - Recommendations submitted in June
- Step 1 = immediate and urgent measures (Federal time frame) mainly to resolve internal DFO problems, many of which were mentioned by Wayne Wouters
- Step 2 = Longer term gaps, envisage much broader approach with participation of industry and provinces
 - Full implementation of the FADS including advocacy for aquaculture development
 - Define what is an appropriate federal role in aquaculture
 - Comparison with other sectors like agriculture
 - How aquaculturists are treated by all federal legislation
 - Find a permanent federal niche for:
 - Advocacy for development
 - Business development support
 - Market intelligence
 - Define what are the rights and obligations associated with aquaculture and ownership of an aquaculture lease
 - Analyze the need for an Aquaculture Act
- Communications strategy: series of fact sheets
- OCAD as a facilitator to help identify solutions and compromises for various conflicting situations with the department
- Important DFO initiatives
 - Office of Sustainable Aquaculture (OSA) - upcoming action plan to implement legal review recommendations including the development of a DFO Aquaculture Policy

- \$75 million investment (Biological / environmental science, ACDRP, CSSP, Policy and Legal Framework)

These are important steps forward and reflect a change.

We did not hear a lot from the Provinces at this conference, although they are major players. However, there is currently a good climate of federal - provincial collaboration as evidenced by the work of the Council of Canadian Fisheries and Aquaculture Ministers (CCFAM).

The CCFAM action plan is examining:

- Service standards
- Siting
- Fish Health Strategy
- Code of Conduct
- R&D priority setting mechanism
- Communication mechanism with industry

These are good steps forward but patience is required. The job we face is to catch up on 15 years of delays in meeting the challenge of the Lead Aquaculture Agency. The cultural shift that was mentioned by John Davis will not take place overnight in a department of 9,000 employees. You have to help with this.

In summary, we have all the ingredients to make aquaculture a huge success story, both in terms of environmental protection and economic development.

It requires industry to:

- Be mature and act responsibly. That also means not waiting or counting on the government to do what is needed.
- Be better organized through strong national, provincial and regional associations that will represent the interests of the aquaculture industry and present your priorities.
- Better communicate with the public, other users, governments, etc. As we have seen, communication is a major piece of the puzzle

And it requires governments to:

- Confirm the legitimacy of aquaculture in policies and legislation.
- Improve access to sites.
- Clearly define the rules under which aquaculture will operate and streamline all processes necessary to get an authorization, a license, a lease, or the right to use adequate pesticides and therapeutants.
- Provide the support services that will insure aquaculture achieves its full potential in Canada.
- Move away from jurisdictional conflicts in order to give administrative responsibility to the level of government better suited to do the job

In other words, work together to achieve this vision of a sustainable and profitable industry that will create economic activity that is very much needed in rural and coastal communities.

I would like to finish with the same conclusion that came out of a recent similar event, the June 1999 Round Table on Aquaculture that led to the \$75 million federal investment in aquaculture. The unanimous conclusion then was – Let's just do it!