

Brian Gunn's Visit to Norway, May 2008

Wild salmon advocates David Lane (CAAR), Brian Gunn (WTA), and Francisco Vera Millaquén (Spokesperson of the Mapuche Huilliche community of Papiukelen Manchup, Chile) recently visited Norway, May 19-22, 2008, to meet with fish farm company executives and shareholders, and the Norwegian media. The visit was organized by the Pure Salmon Campaign (PSC), lead by Bart Naylor and Don Staniford. PSC own shares in Cermaq, the second largest fish farm company in the world, which also owns Mainstream salmon farms and EWOS salmon feed stock companies in BC. The Norwegian Government owns 40% of Cermaq company shares.

The purpose of our visit was to illustrate to the Norwegian people, the salmon farming industry (which for the most part is concentrated in Norway), and more specifically Cermaq executives and shareholders, the grave impacts fish farming is having on wild fisheries in BC and Chile and our businesses. A specific effort was to gather support for a PSC resolution to the Cermaq AGM to have Cermaq conduct an independent audit of their environmental and social practices in Chile and BC. A dramatic and captivating film produced by Twyla Rostovitch, which profiles the fish farm impacts on wild salmon through sea lice infestation and features Cermaq farms, was also shown to the Cermaq shareholders and the Norwegian public. The film received good press and a personal dramatic response from Lise Bergan Director of Corporate Affairs for Cermaq. View the video at: <http://youtube.com/watch?v=8Dt3sNpaX0E>.

Unfortunately the Cermaq Shareholders voted down the resolution instead supporting the position that they did not need an audit as they were already complying with government standards and guidelines. Cermaq gave us a copy of a paper prepared by Sonja Saksida for Cermaq that critiqued the work of independent science concluding that open net caged salmon farms were not contributors to the decline of wild salmon fry and in fact that salmon populations in the Broughton Archipelago have improved since farming started (a response to this paper is coming from the Coastal Alliance for Aquaculture Reform)

We were informed that the Norwegian people, who pride themselves in setting high standards for companies it controls, are not happy about this situation. They feel embarrassed about Norway's position on this issue.

In BC. the company Mainstream has turned a blind eye to the independent, peer reviewed science and research and have produced obfuscating research that denies that there is a problem. Mainstream have also decided not to participate in the Coastal Alliance for Aquaculture Reform (CAAR) program or communicate with wild salmon advocates such as the WTA. CAAR is working with Marine Harvest, First Nations and the Provincial Government to implement fallow routes through the Broughton Archipelago and to look at the feasibility of closed containment facility technology. Cermaq told us that they have always been prepared to move contentious farms, but they cannot get any lease sites to move to. They told us that they are seriously thinking about joining the dialogue with CAAR, as they have not been successful in discussions with First Nations and the

Provincial Government. They also state that they would be coming out the Broughton Archipelago in August (with their BOD) and be willing to meet with the WTA and tourism operators. (Note that they said this last year but such a visit never materialized.)

In Chile, the situation is different and presently much worse than in BC. There, the salmon farm companies have very few regulations regarding the siting of farms. The result has been very serious crowding of farms resulting in severe lice problems in their farm stocks (Chile does not have any wild salmon so the lice transfer situation is not the same as in BC). Worse is the outbreak of ISA: a disease that has wiped out about 30% of the farm populations. The only practical cure is to shut down all the farms in the diseased area and move to completely new areas. This has resulted in great losses in what was once a very profitable industry for Chile.

In addition, the Mapuche Huilliche people of Chile have up their local economy and life based on income from the farms. The relocation of the farms due to the ISA outbreak, and the subsequent loss of employment will bring social havoc to these indigenous people.

The people Brian met from the Norwegian government and environmental community were interested in what he had to say, but not enough time was available in which to really get into subjects or get concrete information - however the contact may be useful for follow up questions. He came away feeling that neither the government nor the environmental community fully understood the problems and impacts associated with fish farms and wild salmon stocks. In Norway, the attention has been put on the health of the farm stocks, with a lack of attention towards the wild stocks. Consequently there are very few wild salmon left in Norway.

Please contact Brian for more detail about his visit, notes of the meetings he attended and photos. Email: mbg@uniserve.com.
