



Third Session, 38th Parliament

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS
(HANSARD)

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON
SUSTAINABLE AQUACULTURE

Victoria

Wednesday, May 16, 2007

Issue No. 42

ROBIN AUSTIN, MLA, CHAIR

ISSN 1718-1054

**SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON
SUSTAINABLE AQUACULTURE**

Victoria
Wednesday, May 16, 2007

Chair:

* Robin Austin (Skeena NDP)

Deputy Chair:

* Ron Cantelon (Nanaimo-Parksville L)

Members:

* Al Horning (Kelowna-Lake Country L)
* Daniel Jarvis (North Vancouver-Seymour L)
* John Yap (Richmond-Steveston L)
* Gary Coons (North Coast NDP)
* Scott Fraser (Alberni-Qualicum NDP)
Gregor Robertson (Vancouver-Fairview NDP)
* Shane Simpson (Vancouver-Hastings NDP)
* Claire Trevena (North Island NDP)

**denotes member present*

Clerk:

Craig James

Committee Staff:

Brant Felker (Committee Research Analyst)

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SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON SUSTAINABLE AQUACULTURE



Wednesday, May 16, 2007
9 a.m.

Douglas Fir Committee Room
Parliament Buildings, Victoria

Present: Robin Austin, MLA (Chair); Ron Cantelon, MLA (Deputy Chair); Gary Coons, MLA; Scott Fraser, MLA; Al Horning, MLA; Daniel Jarvis, MLA; Shane Simpson, MLA; Claire Trevena, MLA; John Yap, MLA

Unavoidably Absent: Gregor Robertson, MLA

Others Present: Brant Felker, Committee Research Analyst

1. The Chair called the Committee to order at 9:19 a.m.
2. The Chair moved a motion to approve the report as amended.

A debate arising and the question being put, it was agreed to on the following recorded division:

Yeas (4)	Nays (4)
G. Coons	R. Cantelon
S. Fraser	A. Horning
S. Simpson	D. Jarvis
C. Trevena	J. Yap

This being a tie vote, the Chair cast his vote in favour of this motion to adopt the report.

3. The Committee adjourned to the call of the Chair at 9:42 a.m.

Robin Austin, MLA
Chair

Craig James
Clerk Assistant and
Clerk of Committees

WEDNESDAY, MAY 16, 2007

The committee met at 9:19 a.m.

[R. Austin in the chair.]

R. Austin (Chair): Good morning. I'd like to call this meeting to order. This is the final meeting of the Committee on Sustainable Aquaculture, and we are here to adopt our final report. Prior to that, I'd just like to open the floor, if there are any comments.

Committee Report to the House

R. Cantelon (Deputy Chair): I won't be supporting adoption of the report. The core recommendation, which dominates the report, is the recommendation to move to closed containment in three years. As I think from what we heard, the evidence supports that that's not a feasible option. Since everything seems to stem from that, the rest of the report is incidental to that core recommendation.

I don't feel we saw anything that would support the need to do that, firstly. Secondly, the technology isn't in a situation or a condition that would enable such a short time period to fulfil that mandate. So I think it's unwarranted and unrealistic. For that reason, I'll be voting against supporting this report.

[0920]

C. Trevena: I'm very disappointed that we haven't been able to come to consensus on this report. I think that we've all worked very hard on it, and I'd like to thank everybody who has worked very hard on it and has gone out and seen what we've seen and heard what we've heard.

I would like to correct the member for Nanaimo-Parksville. He says it's a three-year transition. The core recommendation is for five years to look at ocean-based closed containment.

While the report acknowledges that there is not ocean-based closed containment in effect at the moment, it is also saying that government should work very hard alongside industry to make sure that we can move to that within the five-year time frame.

A five-year time frame is, we believe, feasible from the state of investigations into and the development of ocean-based closed containment at this stage. We know of at least two projects that are working very hard on this. So we think that is feasible.

There are other recommendations in the report which are not related to ocean-based closed containment, issues such as introducing a fallowing system, as was seen previously; working closely with first nations, making sure the new relationship underpins everything that we do on the coast with aquaculture; and making sure that we are being much more inclusive. There are many recommendations here that are not hinged on ocean-based closed containment, which really does underline why I'm very disappointed we weren't able to find consensus on this report.

J. Yap: I, too, am disappointed. But I come from the point of view that, at the very beginning, this seemed to be where we were headed, and here we are today.

Basically, the majority on this committee is recommending that this industry, which provides 3,000 jobs, which provides almost \$400 million in economic activity in areas that desperately need economic opportunity.... We're seeing, basically, recommendations to eventually shut down this industry.

If you read the first recommendation, 1.1, and you distill it down, the words that stand out are: "a rapid transition to closed containment immediately." That is what industry will hear, and that is what will resonate through the industry and through the communities. That's very unfortunate.

There has been great progress made by this industry over the years since it started in the 1970s and 1980s. The industry today is not what it was 20 years ago or ten years ago or even five years ago. This report, in my view, really doesn't give a lot of credence to the progress that has been made. I think it's unfortunate that the majority has decided to respond clearly on the side of the people who advocate strongly from a very narrow environmental point of view. This is the result that we have.

I think it's very timely that a couple of days ago, there was a commentary in a major newspaper, which I want to put on the record. It says as follows:

"B.C. has perhaps the world's best standards and regulations governing the operations of salmon farms. I hope the MLA committee does not surrender to the anti-fish farm hype that has dominated public discourse, that it quickly recommends that we get on with building a valuable export industry and that the government get on with issuing new licences."

This is a direct quote from this article and the author, Dan Miller, a former premier of B.C. I think it speaks volumes that the former NDP premier of our province would have this balanced point of view. Unfortunately, today we've seen, with this series of recommendations and this majority recommendation report, that we are turning our backs on this industry.

So with that, Mr. Chair, I will be voting against this report.

[0925]

S. Fraser: I'd like to thank all of the participants who have been involved in this process. It's been hundreds, if not thousands, of individuals and groups across the coastal province who have come forward and spent a lot of time and effort to try to educate us. I noted that Mr. Miller wasn't a part of our committee, and he wasn't part of all of those trips.

That was in our terms of reference. I think we've reflected that well in this report: the economic and environmental impacts of the aquaculture industry in B.C. and the economic impact of aquaculture on B.C.'s coastal and isolated communities and balancing that with sustainable options for aquaculture in B.C. — the balance and the goals that are necessary in British Columbia.

The report reflects the many submissions that we've received from across the province, from industry, from first nations, from coastal communities, from NGOs and from concerned individuals. Again, I applaud them for taking the time to meet with us.

That being said, the people in the industry, I think, are robust and versatile, and this will move them and poise them for a good future. The balance is protecting the wild stock and the environment. That's a tough one to walk, and I think we've walked it well.

I thank all members of the committee for being involved. We had some pretty scary times on some of our trips. Some of our flights were less than safe, I thought. We all survived it. Most of all, I would like to end by thanking Brant, who was our sole staff. He is going to deserve a bit of a break, I think.

A. Horning: As you know, I got on the committee in the latter part of it. I'll just reflect on the last part that I did see. Of course, not being able to get out to see a fish farm, I did take the opportunity to get out there just a few weeks ago. My first reaction when I was at the fish farm was: what's the big deal here? Everything seemed to be in order.

I want to go back to when I first got on the committee. The first group that we met was mayors from throughout Vancouver Island. Everyone that sat up there and talked to us said: "Without fish farming in my community, we're going to be devastated. We rely on the fish farms for our people to make a living and for our communities to survive." Their bottom line was that if fish farms don't succeed, we're going to be in deep trouble. We're going to have high unemployment and that sort of stuff. It's going to be devastating to our communities.

One of the first nations that I was able to attend was up at Klemtu. There I heard the Chief up there, Chief Archie, saying: "This is the best thing that ever happened to us. We have a plant here. We do fish farming, and all our people are working, and we've got to continue this."

I also heard that throughout the coast there were other first nations that would like to get into it, knowing that that's the way they're going to be able to survive and make their living in those communities.

One of the issues when I first got on was sea lice. From all I can see and everything I've read, I believe we have that under control, so I don't see that as an issue.

I don't understand why we would come up with the recommendations that would require three years to get into closed containment, which I have been told many, many times — and nobody has told me yet that it works — is going to take some time. Time is of the essence with this thing. If you make the time period too short, these people who are in the business are going to go away.

I'm disappointed that we're not out there helping these farms that exist and do what is possible. We've come up with a lot of recommendations which, if they adopt, would certainly do well for that industry. So from the length of time that I've been there, I'm certainly going to have to vote against this report.

G. Coons: I'm also disappointed that we couldn't get consensus on this and move forward, as our mandate was to ensure that both the wild stocks and aquaculture are sustainable in our province. I think the recommendations that we've made get us to that end.

Again, we have to remember — I brought this out previously — that as we've looked at how we got here.... We had salmon farms. We had a moratorium. We had the *Salmon Aquaculture Review*. I brought out that the PFRCC thought that the moratorium was put in place prematurely, because the science — the knowledge gaps — wasn't there that the *Salmon Aquaculture Review* insisted be there.

We've seen that clearly through the DFO presentations. We've seen that clearly through the Pacific Salmon Forum with all of the research that they say needs to be done — the gaps that are still there — to protect our wild stocks.

When we look at going to ocean-based closed containment, in a frame of five years — as the member noted, it was three, but it's to five years.... I do not believe that we are advocating on the side of the narrow-minded people that think we need to decimate the industry. We're here to ensure the industry survives in a way that is sustainable and environmentally friendly.

I believe that we have to ensure that the federal government and our province use the precautionary principle. When we put the aquaculture industry and advocating for the aquaculture industry and the wild stocks on equal footing, it is unacceptable, and I think we bring that out in our report.

I also want to comment on Dan Miller's editorial. Obviously, there are many inaccuracies in there. He cited reports that.... Again, as we pick and choose portions of it.... Also, he indicated that there was a moratorium, and there is not a moratorium currently. I do have to stress that Mr. Miller does not represent his former constituents, and if he was currently in a position, he would have problems on the north coast with his comments. But he's free to make them.

I guess right now I feel the recommendations will put us where we need to be. I feel comfortable with them, and I hope the government moves forward on it.

D. Jarvis: I, too, would like to thank everyone that's been involved over the past many months. I have felt that the majority of visits we had and the evidence that came forward were based on assumptions rather than science. We got very centred on different things such as sea lice and all the rest of it — which is an unproven factor at the moment. They're still studying it. The Canadian salmon forum is still working on it and doing various studies.

The one aspect that really has bothered me was the fact that we forgot, in our report, about the fact that the wild fishery is being attacked by every country in the world and is slowly diminishing and being destroyed and that aquaculture probably will be the last resort in feeding people fish in this world, through farming itself, or aquaculture.

Now, the majority of the committee is against expansion in British Columbia, which I think is a negative

aspect of it. The unproven transition requirement that they've put forward is going to have unbelievable consequences, I believe, throughout the whole province, especially in the north, and not only to the owners and operators, etc., but to the almost 3,000 employees. The majority of them at the present time are on upper Vancouver Island. It will lead to an economic loss to this province and to those various areas.

[0935]

I can see no reason why we must stop the expansion of farms by grandfathering the Kitasoo area. I think it's grossly unfair, as there are other Indian bands further up that wish to get into the aquaculture business, because they realize it's an economic boon to their people. This report is closing them out of that industry.

I think it's something we have to think about. If containment is not discovered or improved in the next three to five years, the aquaculture industry on this coast will be basically shut down. I'm not prepared to live with that, and I'm surprised that some of the members that are from the northern areas would themselves be amenable to it.

On that premise, I think that the report we are putting out now is not going to be a healthy thing for British Columbia's wild stock or the aquaculture end of it, so I will have to vote against it.

S. Simpson: I would add my voice to that of all the other members in thanking the Clerk's office and all of the staff who made it possible for this committee to do its work, helping get us around, recording our comments and making sure that people who wanted to have a chance to speak with us had that opportunity — certainly my thanks to them and to all the work in helping to prepare this report.

I'm pleased to support this report. I think it's a balanced report. I think it brings balance to this industry that hasn't been there previously. What we heard when we were in our travels.... We heard a couple of things.

Certainly, we heard from everybody that our primary concern, our paramount concern, had to be the protection of the wild salmon. That was what we heard from people in the industry and outside the industry. Almost without question, everybody, when it was put to them, said: "Yes, that has to be your first concern." I think we as a committee and this report take that position to heart.

We also heard a vast amount of science, peer-reviewed science. The compelling argument in that science was that sea lice are a problem, that the linkage to the fish farms is real and that it's a problem that has to be addressed. I think the argument was compelling, and certainly the vast majority of peer-reviewed science made that case. It was made here in British Columbia, and it was made in other countries where fish farming has a much longer history than here.

Our challenge became to find a way to ensure that this industry had a future and ensure that we dealt with that issue of the paramountcy of salmon, and that meant having to address the question of sea lice.

What we've said here in this report is that technology is moving forward. We've called for the industry and

other interest groups — much like the CAAR-Marine Harvest approach that's going on now, a collaborative effort that I think we should all embrace — to move forward and look at, over the next five years, developing the technology for ocean-based closed containment that will allow this industry to thrive — and to thrive in a way that is much more sustainable than today.

The other things we did in this report. We did talk about and put forward an improved regulatory regime. We've talked about greater advancement and supports for marketing in the industry to ensure that the industry can market its product around the world.

We've talked for the first time about real respect for the first nations, broad respect for the first nations interests in this and giving the first nations a meaningful role in the future of this industry — and, in the case of shellfish, to in fact make the first nations the primary contributors in the area of shellfish, creating great opportunities, hopefully, for them to move that sector of aquaculture forward.

I feel very positive about the way we've gone forward with this. I think it does provide balance. I look forward to the debate over this over the coming weeks. I only hope that the minister and the government see fit to look at this in a more thoughtful way than the members who are, unfortunately, going to vote against it.

[0940]

R. Cantelon (Deputy Chair): I just wanted to add a thank-you. I omitted thanking Brant and staff, and I think the Hansard crew served us well in their travails and excitements — and the pilots and all of those who made this rather exciting journey quite interesting.

I have to have one parting comment. Compelling politics, we heard; compelling evidence, we didn't hear.

R. Austin (Chair): At this time I'd like to have a motion to approve the report as amended.

Motion approved on the following division:

	YEAS — 4	
S. Simpson	Coons	Fraser
	Trevena	
	NAYS — 4	
Jarvis	Horning	Cantelon
	Yap	

C. James (Clerk Assistant and Clerk of Committees): It's a tie vote.

R. Austin (Chair): In casting my vote, I will do so with those voting in favour of this motion to adopt the final report. I believe sufficient debate has occurred, which allows the committee to fulfil its terms of reference. So the motion passes.

For the information of the members of the committee, this afternoon this report will be tabled in the House.

There won't be a debate this afternoon, but needless to say, there will be lots of debate outside of the House once the report is tabled.

With that, I would ask for a motion to adjourn.

The committee adjourned at 9:42 a.m.

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