



Salmon farm predator nets continue to take heavy toll on marine mammals

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High resolution video and photos available.

SOINTULA, B.C.— Open net cage salmon farms continue to take a lethal toll on marine mammals, Living Oceans Society reported today. Within a two week period this spring a Pacific white-sided dolphin, a harbour porpoise and a Steller sea lion were entangled and drowned in the predator nets at Mainstream Canada's Wehli Bay farm in the Broughton Archipelago.

Fish farms are only required to report mammals they shoot, not those that become entangled and drown in their predator nets. This failure in reporting requirements means the extent of the total yearly mammal deaths on all B.C. salmon farms is unknown.

"The aquaculture reporting requirements are clearly inadequate in B.C.," said Will Soltau, Living Oceans Society's Local Salmon Farm Outreach Coordinator. "Local observers reported these deaths, but neither the federal nor provincial government has comprehensive data on the scope of mammal drownings coast-wide. If these incidents are any indication, the scale could be of significant concern."

The Wehli Bay farm was stocked with salmon smolts in mid March. On March 22, divers contracted by Mainstream to work on the predator nets confirmed finding a dead Pacific white-sided dolphin, and on March 25 reported a drowned harbour porpoise. Harbour porpoises and Steller sea lions are listed as species of special concern by COSEWIC and are protected under Canada's Species at Risk Act. The carcasses were released by the fish farm divers and so a necropsy was not possible.

Mainstream removed the smolts from the Wehli Bay site near the end of March but left the empty net pens and the predator nets in place, apparently unattended.

A third mammal, a tangled and drowned Stellar sea lion, was recorded on underwater video on April 2 by filmmaker Twyla Roscovich while she accompanied researcher Alex Morton on her study of wild salmon smolts in the area. The sea lion was not mentioned in the dive reports.

When questioned by Living Oceans about the dead sea lion, Mainstream's Environmental Manager, Randy Mercer replied on April 13 that they had "investigated this allegation and it turned out to be a rumour (sic). So there was no sea lion."

"Mainstream's response, clearly countered by video evidence of the drowned sea lion in their nets, demonstrates the unreliability of any information that is provided," said Alexandra Morton of Raincoast Research Society. "And it certainly makes me wonder how many marine mammals are being caught in these nets. This is one farm whose nets were in the water about three weeks."

Living Oceans Society is concerned that the problem of marine mammal deaths in the region could increase if Mainstream Canada's application for another new salmon farm at Providence Point across Wells Passage from Wehli Bay is approved.

“Mainstream’s new application is a carbon copy of their open net cage farm at Wehlis Bay and will present all the same problems of predator entanglement, waste accumulation from uneaten fish feed and fish feces, and the negative interactions between farmed and wild salmon,” said Soltau. “We’re working hard to convince the B.C. salmon farming industry and both levels of government to make the transition from open net-cage to closed containment, a system that would eliminate the problem of predator/farm interactions.”

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High resolution video available for download at:

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