NEWFOUNDLAND AQUACULTURE INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION

Fact Sheet on Infectious Salmon Anemia (ISA)

July 8, 2012

ISA OVERVIEW

Infectious Salmon Anemia (ISA) is a serious but manageable virus that occurs in nature and can also affect salmon farms. A recent confirmation by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) of ISA in Newfoundland and Labrador is the first of its kind in this province and has sparked media attention and some discussion and confusion in the community.

While all salmon farming companies view ISA as a serious virus, they have lived with and managed ISA for many years. This recent confirmation by CFIA of the presence of ISA on the Butter Cove site owned and operated by Gray Aqua Group shows that the surveillance and fish health program is working. Both levels of government and all companies are taking the necessary actions to manage the virus and to prevent its spread.

Here are quick facts on ISA:

- ISA is a natural virus, not something created by salmon farming
- ISA can be a serious threat but since we know it is in the environment we have learned how to test for it and manage it
- Although this is the first case in Newfoundland and Labrador, ISA has been confirmed recently in Nova Scotia, and through effective management strategies in New Brunswick, it has not been detected since 2006
- The confirmation of ISA in Newfoundland and Labrador shows that fish health monitoring is effective
- There remains no clinical signs of the virus on this site and so early detection allows the company to take precautionary and preventative measures to minimize the potential spread to other farming sites
- Ongoing monitoring and fish health sampling continues on all farms in the region. If further cases of ISA are detected, the same aggressive and proactive steps will be taken by industry in collaboration with the Province of NL and CFIA
- This confirmation of ISA in Newfoundland and Labrador is viewed as a part of farming on the East Coast – industry does not take this virus lightly but are confident it can be managed
- The aquaculture industry remains committed to its expansion and development plans on the South Coast of Newfoundland and Labrador

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For more information, the following Q&A provides answers to some of the most common questions about ISA…

1. What is ISA?
Infectious Salmon Anemia (ISA) is a naturally occurring virus that spreads slowly and is present in wild fish in many parts of the world, including eastern Canada and the United States. While ISA is harmful to salmon, it poses no risks to human health.

2. Is the ISA virus harmful to humans?
No. While ISA is harmful to salmon, it poses no risks to human health.

3. Does ISA pose a threat to fish species other than salmon?
No. Veterinarians and scientists say that ISA poses no known threat to other fish species such as lobster, herring or cod. Although herring and cod can carry the virus, there is no adverse affect.

4. Doesn't the fact that we suspect ISA prove that farming salmon is not safe?
No. Like all farmers we are affected by environmental conditions and the natural presence of parasites, viruses and pathogens. ISA is a virus that spreads slowly and is present in wild fish in many parts of the world, including eastern Canada and the United States. Rigorous testing and monitoring is in place to detect the presence of viruses as quickly as possible. That is what happened in NL recently.

5. What is industry doing to control ISA?
Evidence of ISA has existed in the wild fishery on the east coast for over 100 years. Since 1996 when ISA was first identified on New Brunswick salmon farms, farmers have worked with scientists, veterinarians and government to manage and prevent outbreaks and stop the virus from spreading. Through effective management strategies in New Brunswick, it has not been detected since 2006.

The New Brunswick salmon farming industry responded to the threat of ISA by developing a bay management area system and strict bio-security protocols for all farming, processing and fish transportation operations as well as the designation of wharves for specific activities and guidelines for vessel traffic. The Newfoundland and Labrador industry is learning from the experiences in other regions and are implementing strict bio-security protocols to minimize the potential threat of ISA in this province.

6. How do salmon farmers manage ISA?
Company veterinarians, biologists and oceanographic specialists and Provincial and Federal veterinarians and regulators provide advice and oversight on our everyday farming practices. Farmers follow innovative farming techniques such as area management, single year stocking, crop rotation, fallowing of farms between crops and strict bio-security protocols to keep fish healthy until they are ready for harvest. If ISA is suspected they take aggressive measures like culling a cage as a preventative measure.

7. What does this ISA virus detection mean for the public? Are the fish in the area at risk?
ISA is a naturally occurring virus that exists in the wild fishery and can also affect salmon farms. While it is harmful to salmon, ISA poses no risk to humans or to other species such as lobster, herring and cod. The ongoing testing and surveillance work of the CFIA and the provincial regulators make sure any new evidence of the virus is detected immediately and proactive measures are taken to prevent spread.

8. What does this ISA virus detection and the loss of the fish on this site mean for the development plans in NL?

While this is an unfortunate event, it is part of the farming business and industry has managed through many challenges like ISA over the years while remaining a successful Atlantic Canadian industry. The industry has strategically diversified in terms of geography, products and markets and is therefore in a strong position to deal with business and farming challenges. All companies remain committed to their NL expansion plans.

9. Why is Salmon Farming Important to NL and to Atlantic Canada for that matter?

Salmon farming has become critical to the social and economic fabric of rural Atlantic Canada. We already provide thousands of good direct and indirect jobs and have the capacity to do so much more. We not only offer high quality, healthy and nutritious food for the Canadian and US marketplace, we offer stability to a region that has been hard hit by economic decline and job losses. Aquaculture is building on the region's marine and agriculture heritage and is becoming the new 'traditional' food sector.