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## DFO investigating farmed fish escape in Whycomomagh Bay



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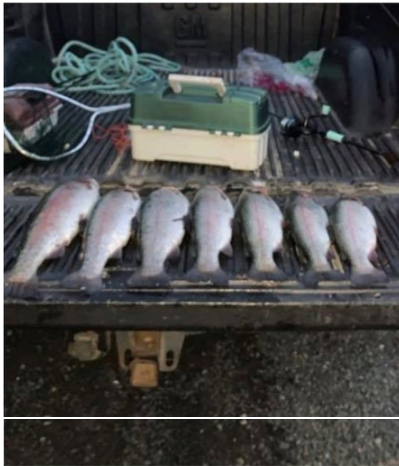
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Anglers have been catching high amounts of rainbow trout in and around Whycomomagh Bay. Fisheries and Oceans Canada has confirmed that the incident is currently under investigation and it's believed that fish have escaped from the aquaculture operations in the Bay. Although DFO couldn't comment regarding the amounts, they do believe it's substantial. There have been reports that losses were due to the hurricane, however, DFO confirmed farmed fish were being caught well before Hurricane Dorian, although it's possible more fish have escaped during the storm.

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Seven rainbow trout caught in Whycomomagh Bay  
September 4, 2019



Four rainbow trout caught in Whycocomagh Bay  
September 14, 2019

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Four rainbow trout caught in Whycocomagh Bay  
September 14, 2019

The system for reporting works off of good faith, numbers that get reported are solely up to the operators of the facility. It's also important to note that these numbers are for the most part, estimations. New regulations require facility operators to report escapees to regulatory bodies as per their licencing agreements, failure to do so is illegal and punishable by law.

It's been confirmed by Fisheries and Oceans Canada that this operation has been approved for the use of chemicals for parasites and disease which are regulated by Health Canada.

What does this mean for the Lakes?

Sadly, we just don't know. We do know a substantial amount of farmed rainbow trout are now running amok in the Bras d'Or Lakes potentially crossbreeding and carrying diseases and parasites with them. Although some anglers are happy with an increase of sport fish in the area, many are concerned for the health of the ecosystem.


A sudden and unexpected increase of farmed fish in an ecosystem could have noticeable impacts with crossbreeding, competition for food and predation on native species may increase. DFO has also expressed concern with farmed rainbows heading to rivers during spawning season.

According to a CBC article dated July 2018 We'koqoma'q First Nation received \$1 million from the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and had invested \$750,000 of its own to double its production of rainbow trout in 2018. An operation in Whycocomagh Bay which started off relatively small has since grown into a substantial operation. In 2016 it was reported that 70,000 rainbow trout were harvested, and another 170,000 were harvested in 2017. We'koqoma'q partnered up with fish farming giant Cooke aquaculture in July 2019 and the operation is reported to have 60 cages in the water, it's estimated they will harvest between \$10-\$12 million fish this year. - CBC News

Open net pens are high-risk operations because they allow free exchange of waste, chemicals, parasites and disease. What types of chemicals? Fish farms are a haven for pests and infectious pathogens, so the use of pesticides and drugs is sometimes needed for fish welfare, to minimize the risk of any potential environmental effects these chemicals need to be regulated by provincial and federal regulators.



Seven pens washed onto private property following Hurricane Dorian  
Little Narrows Cape Breton, NS (September 13, 2019)



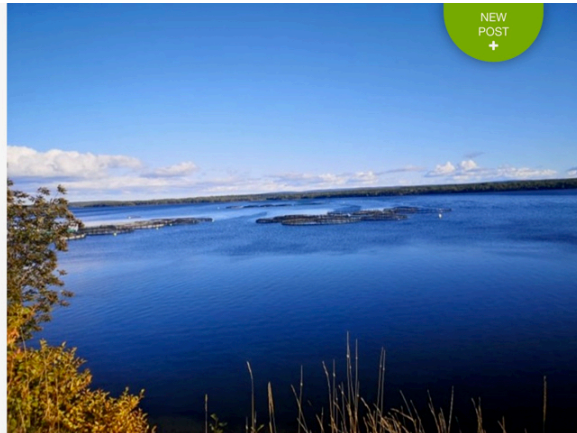
Fish farming consists of various systems some are high risk systems, and some are low risk systems.

What are high risk systems?

They are systems which allow the free exchange of pollutants such as waste, chemicals, parasites and diseases. These systems can be free exchange systems positioned in bodies of water or enclosed ponds. When the wastewater from the pond is treated before being discharged into a marine or freshwater environment it's classified as low risk, however, in some cases waste from ponds is directly deposited into these environments without treatments.

Open net pen or "cage" aquaculture is a high-risk system and can be found in Whycocomagh Bay. Cages or pens are placed offshore, in coastal areas or in freshwater lakes, it's essentially a series of large pens consisting of netting which is then anchored to the bottom. They're designed in a way which allows free exchange of waste, chemicals, parasites and diseases. There's always the potential for escape.

How do fish escape? Holes in the netting, storm events, transportation, vandalism, insurance claims are some of the most common.



Open net pens – Whycocomagh Bay  
(September 13, 2019)

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What are low risk systems?

Closed systems, or closed containment farming methods are designed to control the exchange between farms and the natural environment. The main objective is to reduce pollution, fish escapes, negative wildlife interactions and the transfer of parasites and diseases from the farm into the marine and freshwater ecosystems. The most common types of closed systems are raceways and recirculating systems.

With the continued expansion of fish farming in the Bras d'Or Lakes, what lies ahead for Whycomomagh Bay and the Lakes tributaries?

If you have information regarding this matter, please contact Fisheries and Oceans Canada 1 (902) 564-7868

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