



Karl Dickob, 808 Crystal Lake Road, Kinmount, Ontario, K0M 2A0
Tel. [705] 488-2660 Fax. [705] 488-2835 Email Kinmountfishfarm@xplornet.com
Web Site: Ontarioaquaculture.net

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Please excuse the length of time between newsletters but be assured that we are always ready to assist, if you have problems that are to be resolved whether it is government related or of other topics that hinder or restrain our industry.

The MNR is the lead agency for aquaculture and **not** what most fish farmers believe that the Ministry of Agriculture and Food is in charge.

It is my opinion that we should assume and expect that the MNR support our industry in a fair way so that the land-based aquaculture becomes a growth and sustainable industry that generates employment and prosperity throughout rural Ontario.

Aquaculture in Ontario is being constrained by the lack of functional government relations and guidelines and the absence of a strategic vision for the sector. As a result if the government is not addressing the need for a new era of cooperation and collaboration among all stakeholders and a determination to address and resolve challenges pertaining to both industry and governments land-based aquaculture might be out of existence in a few years. Existing fish farmers will most likely retire and no new farmers will enter our industry unless under more favorable prospects to succeed.

The big question is there hope for government changes? I am very much encouraged by that the Honorable Minister Donna Cansfield appreciates the socio/economic potential that aquaculture has to benefit Ontario.

I had the privilege to be invited to the Ministers Levee in Toronto on January 4th 09. Mr. Labignon from Canadian Sport Fishing Production, Mr. Zaichuck [OFEAA Dir.] and I attended the occasion. At the levee were several hundred people but the Minister found the time to listen to our problems and suggestions for the better time of 20 minutes in a back room.

She suggested to us that we get in touch with her office and she would arrange that an ADM and one of her special advisers would meet with us to discuss issues that constrain our industry and what support is needed from the government to develop viable and sustainable aquaculture farms in Ontario.

Fleming College in Lindsay proposes to start a new Hatchery Fish Culture Program in the foreseeable future for new fish farmers and other interested stakeholders.

This would be an intensive program over a four month period from May to August. OFEAA welcomes this needed initiative of the College and is in full support of the program.

Ms. Skilton the Dean of Fleming College and I decided that we should hold a joint meeting at the College in Lindsay.

A date was proposed for February 5th 09 and the Ministers office accepted the date, time and location and would send two senior persons. [Assistant Deputy Minister and a Special Adviser to the Minister]

All participants of the meeting OFEAA and Fleming College alike were in full agreement that aquaculture must play an important role in the future in Ontario and must be supported more by the government.

We think that the meeting achieved its goal to impress the Ministers persons with the different presentations that the speakers put forward and as such we all think that this was a first very productive and informative meeting.

We will have to see what the outcome will be of the meeting and devise a follow up strategy.

See also the agenda notes of the speakers

Karl Dickob
President, OFEAA



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Land-Based Aquaculture in Ontario 2009:
This paper was prepared by the Ontario Fishery Enhancement and Aquaculture Association to discuss and assess the present status and outlook of the Aquaculture Industry in Ontario at a meeting at the Fleming College in Lindsay February 5, 2009.

The meeting was attended by:

Ms. Rosalynne Lawrence ADM MNR

Mr. Colin MacDonald MNR Minister Office

Ms. Linda Skilton Dean Fleming College.

Dr. Brent Wooton Fleming College

Dr. Eric Sager Fleming College

Mr. Italo Labignon Canadian Sport Fishing Production [OFEAA]

Ms. Laura Engelman OFEAA Member

Mr. Bruce Blacktopp OFEAA Member

Mr. Karl Dickob President, OFEAA

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Introduction

The Aquaculture industry in Ontario is in comparison to other countries just a cottage industry. In the last few years the industry has stagnated due to bureaucratic impediments and uncertain policies and regulations. Some fish farms closed down and in the next few years more will follow down that path way since present fish farmers are on the average between 60 and 70 years old and will retire. Most of these farms will be lost as fish farms because they are more valuable as investments for other criteria.

Unless the government takes a more active role in coordinating the different ministries that regulate the aquaculture industry in Ontario, the industry will never fulfill the socio/economic role that could be expected. At the present time Ontario spends millions of dollars on fish products imported from often questionable quality and sources.

As an example one state in Germany [Bavaria] has 5.000 fish farms ranging in size of one pond to several hundred hectares culturing cold and warm water fish. Turkey has 1215 farms that produce 30.000 t a year.

Ontario governments spent millions of dollars over the last 15 to 20 years on aquaculture education, market surveys and workshops to promote aquaculture and we have not much to show and be proud of.

Ontario trained at least 4.000 students to become aquaculture technicians over a 20 year period and only a few found a full time job in Ontario. For most it was a dead end job on cage farms in other provinces. What a waste of human resources.

To attract new investment and renewed interest in aquaculture and make it reasonably feasible to establish new farms and/or keep established farms operating we suggest that a new approach to resolve impediments will be tried.

It will be essential that the government [Minister] plays a direct overseer role in the undertaking or nothing will change as the past has shown with a few exceptions when a Minister got directly involved.

Aquaculture Methods

Aquaculture has been around for over 2.000 years and since the middle Ages in Europe with no negative effects on the environment if practiced in a sustainable way.

Ontario has studies and regulations in place to safe guard the environment from abuse and damage that fish farms may be responsible for.

Cold water [salmonids] and cool water fish [bass, walleye] need their respective medium to be cultured in

Cold water fish

In Ontario trout are mainly cultured in concrete flow through raceways or tanks and in grow-out operations in cages around Manitoulin Island in Georgian Bay.

These are mostly intensive fish culture operations.

There is not much room for new large land based cold water fish farms in Southern Ontario because of lack of sufficient cold water supply.

Cool water fish

Bass, Walleye, Perch etc. are cultured at only a few private farms at the present time and mostly in ponds on an extensive basis. This means a low density stocking rate and on natural food produced by the pond.

The culturing of these fish has a very high potential on a semi and even intensive basis. They have a higher market value than trout and water sources and potential culture sites are abound in the province.

Socio/Economic Opportunities

A solid well established land-based aquaculture industry would serve Ontario in a variety of ways:

Since there are few or no qualified persons about to start a sophisticated new fish farm that requires a large investment up front it is best for the new fish farmer to culture fish extensively in ponds. A pond culture fish farm for cool water fish is relatively a low cost venture that can be expanded in time with experience.

In time when skilled aquaculture technicians for cool water fish are available large recycle farms like they are now in Europe and elsewhere will attract capital to establish these kinds of farms.

Economic stimulus:

Real Estate Transaction	[increased land value]
Pond or facility construction	[job]
Fish Farm Supplies	[business]
Food fish [example bass]	[to supply 1lbs of bass for one meal a year for the Chinese community in Toronto about 300.000 fish are required].
Bait fish culture	{ \$25.000.000 business in Ontario }
Bait fish culture	[mosquito control west Nile virus]
Game fish culture for:	Fishing preserve
Game fish culture for:	Fishing preserves in Toronto [one preserve turnover \$300.000 a year].
Game fish culture for:	Private pond or lakes
Game fish culture for:	Ontario waters to enhance fishing opportunities and Tourism.
Perch & bluegill culture	Great lakes fish processors need more than 30.000 ton a year to supply their customers in the US a year. The drastic cut in the fishing quota in Lake Erie for these fish resulted in the idling of their plants for part of the year and resulting in job losses.

The cool water fish farmer has a guaranteed Market for years whether he is a small or large producer of fish.

Constrains that are a hindrance for a sustainable Aquaculture Industry in Ontario

The Ministry of Natural Resources is the lead agency to regulate the Aquaculture Industry in Ontario. In that regard OFEAA assumes and expects the full support of the MNR so that we can in a meaning full way serve all Ontarians and other stakeholders which are not directly involved with the Ministry.

Unfortunately MNR regulations and policies that govern the aquaculture industry were written at the convenience of MNR bureaucrats and input of our industry was mostly disregarded. There is no dispute resolution mechanism in place to revisit for amending and modernizing regulations and policies as the need arises.

Common recurring problems are:

MNR treat fish farmers like money making aliens.

Long delays in issuing stocking licenses some times weeks for private ponds

Unwarranted pond inspection before a stocking permit is issued, is time consuming and costly for MNR personal.

Long delays in issuing stocking licenses for Ontario waters.

Have people bring ownership proof of their property before a license is issued.

Conditions are put on license that are sometimes costly and are irrelevant to serve any purpose.

MNR is unsupportive in providing gametes or fry from government hatcheries at a reasonable cost to the private sector fish farms.

MNR is unsupportive to provide walleye eggs from wild fish citing low wild stock, public misgivings and other excuses that can't be substantiated.

Licensing process for new fish farms needs to be simplified and completed in a reasonable time frame. At the present time it may take up to a year.

If the MNR would be more cooperative with the private sector industry and their customers many environmental issues could be avoided especially unauthorized stocking of fish into Ontario waters that may be a threat to native fish in that water system.

The Conservation Authorities are in many cases problematic to deal with.

Solutions that may alleviate constrains by a lack of functional government relations and guidelines and the absence of a strategic vision of the Aquaculture Industry and associated other stake holders

To attract new investment and renewed interest in aquaculture and make it reasonably feasible to establish new fish farms we suggest that a new approach to resolve impediments will be tried.

It will be essential that the government plays a direct overseer role in the undertaking or nothing will change as the past has shown with a few exception when a Minister got directly involved.

For the MNR Minister who is the lead regulator for the Aquaculture Industry and for the Conservation Authority to be informed in an unbiased direct way from private sector stake holders we suggest that the Minister establish a:

“Fishery Enhancement and Aquaculture Council”

This council should be chaired by a MPP who has access to all Ministers that are in some way connected in regulating aquaculture or have otherwise an indirect interest.

The Ministers of the following Ministries should make available to the council a special advisor of his/her staff [no bureaucrat].

MNR, OMAF, OMEE, TORISM, NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT, EDUCATION and others if needed.

The Aquaculture Industry would provide four persons [2 OFEAA 2NOAA].

Other stake holders might be invited for consulting.

Details on the procedures to be developed by Minister Staff.

Fishery Enhancement and Aquaculture Policy and Regulation Advisory Committee.

This committee will advice regulators on how to develop reasonable and workable policies and regulations in a timely fashion so that they can be implemented in due time. This committee needs to have the authority to bring together parties to resolve conflicts.

This committee should be chaired by a staff from the MNR in Peterborough other members on the committee should be from: OMAF, OMEE, OFEAA and NOAA. This committee could meet in Peterborough.

At the present time there is only one person full time appointed between the Aquaculture Industry and OMAF who is a very competent and trusted technician serving our industry. There is a need to have a well versed person from the MNR and OMEE who is capable and understands aquaculture.

Proposed Educational Program for Aquaculture by the Fleming College in Lindsay

OFEAA has reviewed the proposed educational manual and we consider it to be the instrument to teach new fish farmers the basics of aquaculture.

Without a program as Fleming College can offer new fish farmers will struggle and may even fail without proper instructions.

Books and the internet may be helpful but have not all the answers.

OFEAA strongly supports this program and we hope that the government makes funding available to start this program as for the benefit of the people of Ontario.

Ontario Fishery Enhancement and Aquaculture Association.

OFEAA was incorporated as a non profit association in 2004 after the Ontario Aquaculture Association went out of business.

Our association is comprised fish farmers, pond owners, land owners, Fishing clubs and other stake holders.

OFEAA sees both the opportunities and missed chances in the past of taking advantage of our natural resources to the fullest.

With the population growth in Ontario a lot of rethinking has to take place to better use and manage our natural resources.

OFEAA wants to be part of this process to develop strategies that protect our environment and also serves Ontario in the future.

The Government of Ontario has in the past few years supplied NOAA with grants of some \$60.000 and several other grants for studies supporting their association. OFEAA thinks that it would be only fair and a good investment for Ontario to make some funding available for our association.

OFEAA is the only association that promotes land-based fish farms and other stake holders and member fees will be insufficient in the future to cover expenses.

The government charges a license fee to operate a fish farm this fee is a pittance for the government coffers but fish farmers are very much offended of this fee but would agree if the government would consider collecting the fee and submit it to an aquaculture association to cover part of their expenses.

Funding to cover office expenses, travel to meetings, telephone, web site, promotional expenses etc.

An answer to this request would be appreciated by OFEAA



Agenda
Aquaculture Meeting
February 5th, 2009
2:00 – 4:30
Room 158
Draft

1. Welcome and Introductions

2. Aquaculture in Ontario – Karl Dickob (30 minutes) OFEAA
 - **Land Based Aquaculture in Ontario 2009**
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 - current constraints – Bruce Blacktop fish farm OFEAA
 - **Unrealistic long delays before MNR issued a fish farm license**
 - **Problems dealing with the local Conservation Authority in obtaining permits**
 -
 - Mr. Labignon from Canadian Sport Fishing Production OFEAA

Presented his experience with fishing in Ontario waters and that the decline of fishing opportunities is hurting tourist outfitters and other businesses in central and northern Ontario. The private sector aquaculture should be more involved with the MNR in stocking Ontario waters.
MNR is lacking funds to fulfill their obligations.

Ms. Laura Engelman Lake Ridge Farm OFEAA
Presented an overview of their cool water ornamental fish farm and that in time imports of fish will not be necessary anymore. This will then greatly reduce the problem of importing diseased fish from other countries.

3. Aquaculture at Fleming College – Linda Skilton and Chris Westcott (10 mins)

The college presented a proposed new hatchery fish culture program for new fish farmers that would give new entrances to the industry needed information and experience to be successful.

4. Aquaculture and the need in Aboriginal communities – Dr. Eric Sager (10 minutes)

Fish culture in ponds might be compatible with native traditional lifestyle and a food source that is readily available.

- 5 Research opportunities – Dr. Brent Wootton (10 minutes)

His presentation was about an affluent treatment facility that is presently in operation at a hatchery in Halliburton.

6. Discussion

The end of all presentations resulted in a question and answer session and an exchange of ideas about aquaculture. It was unanimous consent that aquaculture is important for the future of Ontario and needs government support.

- 7 Tour of Fleming facilities – Mark Newell and Chris Westcott

The meeting ended with a tour of the college hatchery which was a very interesting experience for all.

Mr. Newell manages the muskellunge research section that cultures a genetic breed that was historically in Lake Simcoe. It is hoped that by stocking these fish the remnant population will again become self sustaining in the future.

Mr. Newell demonstrated how the small muskies feed on live minnows.

Mr. Chris Westcott manages the main section of the college aquaculture facility. This facility has a very impressive recycling system that uses relatively little water. At this time there were more than 100,000 salmon fry in the rearing tanks. These salmon will grow sufficiently so that they can be stocked into Lake Ontario in the fall. The salmon sport fishery is of great economic importance for Ontario and the college and their students involvement is invaluable.