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The Status of Aquaculture in Ontario in 2005

I write this Assessment and Discussion paper without prejudice but with the intent to make public as how I see it, what is wrong in terms of how the aquaculture industry is supported by past and present government ministries.

In the late 1970 the then government started promoting aquaculture and promised far reaching changes to entice fish farming. First trout species were encouraged to be cultured and many new farms were started especially in south western Ontario some were successful others failed after a few years.

At the same time the game and fish act was to be changed to allow additional warm water species to be cultured and sold as food fish and fish for stocking.

For more than 15 years the MNR stalled and held up the necessary changes to the Game and Fish Act.

In 1994 I, two fish farmers and a reporter approached my MPP who was the Agriculture Minister to make him aware of the problem we have. He was surprised to hear about this and took our brief to the then Minister of Natural Resources. This Minister acted promptly on our request and ordered draft legislation on this matter to be drafted within six months. This time line was kept and ready to be presented to the house to be voted on. To be sure that this bill would pass this time and would not die again before it goes to the house to be voted on I invited to a special meeting in Guelph from each political party the MNR critics to see whether they would support this bill.

The NDP who was sponsoring the bill was there

The PC MNR critic who I know well was there

The Liberal MNR critic who flew in from Manitoulin Island was there.

All pledged their support and the bill passed as part of an Omnibus bill and became law.

The following year a new government came to power and the new MNR Minister who I know personally well was while he was in office very supportive towards aquaculture.

With his encouragement I rejoined the OAA and became a Director Liaison MNR and remained in that position until the association faltered.

I write the above to let anybody know that in my experience to deal with the government have a written document that outlays your problem and proposal as how to solve it. This document should be presented best by an association to be most effective and highlight how the proposal best serves the community, the province and the government in power if accepted and implemented.

Never ask for personal considerations since nobody likes to be compromised the least a politician! Most politicians I met are fairly decent persons [with exceptions] and willing to do their best, but one shall not forget their background might have little to do with aquaculture.

It is now the year 2005 and I am a full time fish farmer for the last 25 years, operating 25 ponds on my 100 acre farm and lease some 20 ponds on a golf course and other properties. I think I operate the most diversified fish farm in Ontario [25 fish species]. I call myself fortunate to be free of mortgages or any loans, so at first glance it might appear that fish farming is a thriving enterprise but to the contrary it is not. To the best of my knowledge no new fish farms have been established in the last eight or ten years in Ontario but quite a few went out of business since in some instances the property was more worth for development than aquaculture.

I predict that if the Government of Ontario will not get directly more involved in the very near future in supporting aquaculture [not so much with money] by ways I shall out line later in this document there will be virtually no aquaculture in Ontario left. Most fish farmers in Ontario are between 60 and 70 years old.

In other countries like Turkey has 1215 fish farms and produces 30.000 t/year. In Germany the state of Bavaria has about 5.000 fish farm operations from very small to very large.

Present and past governments have spent millions of dollars in support of aquaculture on studies, promotions, education and other activities. But in my opinion most of that money was wasted since we have not much to show for what it was intended for.

For more than 20 years a school in Lindsay turned out year after year aquaculture technicians also it should have been clear that there were no job opportunities.

Money was and I think still is spend on studies that are never being intended to be implemented.

I shall not get any further on with this subject at this time.

Since I am 66 years old I think that I am past the conflict of interest stage and see it as a duty and a privilege to put my experience in aquaculture and how it is addressed in other parts in the world up for debate.

Ontario fish farmers were for the last 30 or more years represented by the Ontario Aquaculture Association until two years ago it became apparent that the association can not serve rightfully and efficiently the needs of the industry as it has evolved over time. So the best way to serve the industry as a whole was to create two new associations. The food fish aquaculture section of the industry and their main suppliers of stockers formed the **Northern Ontario Aquaculture Association**. The other association that was formed is the **Fishery Enhancement and Aquaculture Association**.

The Fishery Enhancement and Aquaculture Association shall not only represent fish farmers but also all stakeholders like pond owners, property owners with water bodies on them suitable for fish stocking, cottage Associations, fishing and hunting clubs, tourist camps and outfitters and others.

To realize the full economic potential that aquaculture has we need new and more fish farms in Ontario. To achieve that goal the government has to be lobbied for support. The climate for new farms to be established at the present time is hampered by ministries like the MNR and OMEE with some regulation and policies that make little environmental sense and are costly to implement.

I in my present position as the president of FEAA propose that we develop a plan that will satisfy government ministries and all other stake holders to establish an industry like other industrialized countries for centuries in Ontario.

The Asian market in Toronto requires about 5,000,000 lbs of warm water fish of which are none cultured in Ontario but being brought in from the US.

The future need for more fish to be stocked into Ontario waters will increase more and more with the population growth and an aging population that has more time for outdoor activities. At the present time the MNR manages and stocks most Ontario waters at their leisure and mostly not to every body's equal benefit. The MNR management policy is more costly than the private sectors and I doubt that this system can neither sustained in the future nor will it be tolerated by anglers as fish stock decreases any more. It will be necessary for the MNR to rethink their management plans and work closer with the private sector and the sooner the better.

Ontario has not a long history in fish culture and therefore traditional experience and know how is lacking. We have therefore to devise and develop a support system that will make it possible for a newcomer to the industry to succeed.

The main parties that should be part of the support system would be :

FEAA

University of Guelph [Aquaculture Extension Center]

OMAF

OMEE

MNR

Government

Each of the above agencies has a special part to play in the development of skills, policies and the implementation of the same.

The University of Guelph:

FEAA and the University develop on and off campus workshops

Gather information from other Universities on studies on new techniques to culture fish.

Research or develop feeds for warm water fish and training regime

Research the application potential for a devise that splits water into oxygen and hydrogen for aquaculture.

This document will be extended further on more information of how the other parties that are mentioned should be involved.

Karl Dickob
President OFEAA

Update

This is a letter that I wrote and send to a Minister but because of some circumstances that occurred I did not follow up on the subject and not much has changed since that time.

I now intend to pursue the promotion of land based aquaculture and will lobby the government with the help of some parties interested in environmentally friendly fish farming.

We will post all news on our web site and welcome input on this very important subject about land use, creating new water retaining ponds with a purpose, food fish production, fish stocking and other economic benefits that fish farming supports for tourism and creating opportunities for sport fishing.

Karl Dickob
President OFEAA

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OMAF as the lead agency for aquaculture

Liaison for FEAA with government agencies, provincial and federal

Brief FEAA on new government policies as they are relevant and important to the industry.

Brief FEAA on any information that becomes available and may help the industry.

Be instrumental in setting up a task force on aquaculture.