

Campbell on Salmon Farms: Playing Dumb or Just Plain Dumb?

Written by [Rafe Mair](#)

I will only say it once, I promise you!

"I told you so" , which I direct at former minister John Van Dongen - who gives "stubborn Dutchmen" a whole new meaning - and at Gordon Campbell. And the subject, in case you didn't guess, is Atlantic salmon fish cages on the coast of British Columbia.

Let me lay out the options these two face: they're either a) too dumb to understand what I, and bless her, Alexandra Morton (and others as the issue gathered steam) were telling them; or b) they deliberately refused to look at the evidence, refused to betray their corporate donors like Norway's Marine Harvest, and for nearly a decade lied through their teeth to us the public.

Now, the "too dumb" choice might apply to Van Dongen, who is easily the thickest politician I've ever known - and believe me that covers a lot of territory. But no one would call Gordon Campbell stupid - joined at the hip to the far rightwing Fraser Institute. An anti-environmentalist, for sure; a serial teller of falsehoods, you bet. But not stupid.

Let me say that I take no pleasure in being proved right. I simply cannot, naively perhaps, understand why a premier would want to jeopardize the wild fish in our province.

Early on, Van Dongen, then the Minister of Agriculture and Lands (who up until Alex's court victory last year had jurisdiction over BC's salmon farms) told me that the public didn't care about fish farms. I said, "They will, minister, they will." I know the people of my province and I knew that once they had been told the story they would rally around our salmon.

Unfortunately the NDP have done a terrible job on this issue as they have on the Private Power issue, which I will deal with in another column.

Premier Campbell has known from the outset of his becoming premier what this issue was all about.

In September 2004, at his request, I did a report to him personally on what the scientists were saying

I said, in opening, *"Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address the question of Atlantic salmon fish farms in BC waters. I believe that you have been badly misinformed on this issue and that had you had time to examine it, as you did the Kemano Completion Project, you would have seen that the threat of fish farms to our wild salmon is infinitely more serious"*.

I went on, *"I think ... that you have been very badly advised. This is, of course, an occupational hazard of being Premier when you must accept what Ministries say. You will remember when we fought the Kemano Completion Project that it became abundantly clear that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans had become politicized with all the fine scientists that had cast doubt on the project having been sent packing one way or another. You will see reference to this in the presentation of Dr. Neil Frazer. (They were dubbed the "dissident scientists" by Alcan, a sobriquet they proudly bore). The DFO remains politicized and in fact has the mandate to promote aquaculture while, supposedly, protecting the wild salmon. I simply cannot believe that if you had been in full possession of the facts that this situation would have reached this sorry pass"*.

Then later, *"I believe that if the onus is properly placed, namely that the fish farm industry must prove beyond a reasonable doubt the safety of their industry, they would fail miserably. It is wrong that the onus is placed upon the public."*

I then presented him with the evidence of Alexandra Morton, the Honourable John Fraser on the "Precautionary Principle", the evidence of Dr John P. Volpe, Ph.D. - then with Department of Biological Sciences at the University of Alberta, now at the University of Victoria - and Dr Neil Frazer, a BC fish biologist presently at the University of Hawaii. Each of them made it abundantly clear that sea lice from fish farms in the Broughton Archipelago were slaughtering migrating Pacific salmon smolts.



Campbell should have known better about salmon farms - Rafe Mair told him so!

Then on September 26, 2007 I wrote this to Mr. Campbell:

“Dear Premier,

Below I have pasted the recent letter of 18 independent scientists and the presentation I made to you three years ago.

I press you on this matter, sir, because when you were leader of the opposition you played a big role in saving the Nechako and the sockeye who travel through it to spawn in the Stuart system. I also well remember you seeing a picture of sockeye spawning and saying that you were much impressed and that you would never do anything in government that would hurt our wild salmon”.

This was their conclusion:

“Pink salmon infected with sea lice, June 1, 2007, Broughton Archipelago, BC

We the undersigned agree that based on the published scientific evidence, the only management action that can ensure the protection of wild salmon stocks from farmed salmon is a complete physical barrier to pathogen transmission between wild and farm salmon (closed containment). We are aware that such changes may have economic consequences for the industry. The science is clear (my emphasis). It is now up to the government and the people of Canada to decide whether the economic benefits of aquaculture, as currently practiced, outweigh the threats to wild salmon and the ecosystems and economies that depend on healthy and abundant wild salmon populations. We write this public letter out of a sense of duty to future generations. Respectfully,

David Suzuki, Ph.D. Founder, David Suzuki Foundation; Daniel Pauly, Ph.D. Director, Fisheries Centre University of British Columbia; Richard Routledge, Ph.D. Department of Statistics and Actuarial Science Simon Fraser University; Larry Dill, Ph.D. Professor and Director, Behavioral Ecology Research Group, Dept. of Biological Sciences, Simon Fraser University; Mark A. Lewis, Ph.D.; Center for Mathematical Biology University of Alberta; Wade Davis, Ph.D. Explorer-in-Residence; National Geographic Society; Boris Worm, Ph.D. Marine Conservation Biology Dalhousie University, Halifax; John Volpe, Ph.D. University of Victoria Environmental Studies Victoria BC; Don McQueen, Ph.D. Emeritus Research Professor; York University, Toronto. Adjunct Professor, Simon Fraser University; Craig Orr, Ph.D.; Executive Director Watershed Watch Salmon Society; Coquitlam, BC; Neil Frazer, Ph.D. Department of Geology and Geophysics University of Hawaii at Manoa; Rob Williams, Ph.D. University of British Columbia St. Andrews University; Pearce Island, BC; Michael Burt, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus University of New Brunswick; Gordon Hartman, Ph.D. Retired Biologist, Fisheries and Oceans Canada; Lance Barrett-Lennard, Ph.D. Co-chair Resident Killer Whale Recovery Team; Paul Spong, Ph.D. Director, OrcaLab/Pacific Orca Society, Hanson Island, BC;

There is no doubt in my mind that the public, now aware of the truth, are demanding that these fish farms be moved out of our oceans - for something else is happening. More evidence is emerging suggesting a possible link between salmon farms and the disastrous collapse of our Fraser River sockeye – many of whom are passing by up to 60 salmon farms right now, as young smolts migrate out to sea up the Georgia and Johnston Straights and through the Broughton.

Just before I conclude I wish to again make it clear that the lady who came to BC from California to study whales, and stayed to try to save our salmon, Alexandra Morton, is a true hero. It was her courage and determination that brought this issue to where it is today with an aroused population demanding action. I'm proud to have had radio shows in the past which had the privilege to hear the truth straight from Alex.

I conclude with this: this crisis, the loss of hundreds of thousands of wild salmon so corporations could take huge profits out of our oceans at the expense of our wild salmon and distribute them to their shareholders - nearly all whom don't live in BC - did not happen by accident. The premier and his government knew from the moment they took office in 2001 that farmed salmon were escaping and taking over the spawning grounds of wild salmon and establishing themselves; they knew from 2002 on that wild salmon smolts were being slaughtered by lice from Atlantic salmon fish farms because I can tell you that every word I said on air or wrote came to the attention of the Premier; every study by Alexandra Morton, and peer reviewed and published was known to this premier; he knew of every scientific report which confirmed Alex's findings because I told him.

I seek and take no credit for this – I was merely the mouthpiece. What I do say is that the premier of this province, refusing to accept overwhelming evidence of



A salmon farm in the Broughton Archipelago