

What can we do now?

By Petru Dima

Translation to English Scot McColl www.netfish.no



The scientific evidence that farmed salmon are the greatest threat to our wild salmon is here. Swedish fisherman and writer Petru Dima has voiced an opinion that is worth sharing with our readers.

“...farm Atlantic salmon have both genetic and competitive impacts on wild populations. As a result of domestication over several generations, genetic changes have reduced the capability of farm salmon to survive in the wild, especially during the marine phase. Overall farm salmon showed an estimated lifetime success of 2% of that of the native wild salmon, and results were consistent in three separate cohorts. Hybrids were intermediate in lifetime success between the wild and the farm (27% - 89% relative to wild). In the second generation hybrids, some 70% of the embryos died in the first few weeks as a result of outbreeding depression.”

Source: McGinnity, P et al. 2003. Fitness reduction and potential extinction of wild populations of Atlantic salmon *Salmo salar* as a result of interactions with escaped farm salmon. Proceedings Royal Society London B (2003). DOI 10.1098/rspb.2003.2520. Or take note of the web address <http://www.seaweb.org/resources/73update/farmedsalmon.html>

Now there is evidence that points towards the fact that something is wrong! What was considered a logic argument is now proven by a 10 year long research project (that is quoted above). The report's content tables what many have feared for some time. The findings can no longer be pushed aside or dismissed. The fact is the Atlantic salmon population is threatened and runs the risk of endangerment.

Now the issue, is it too late to act? I'm now faced with the pressing question of “what do we do now?” If we wish to preserve the wild salmon population for the future something radical needs to be done and it needs to be done now. We need action. I'm of the opinion that we are all weary of the debate about the cause of the massive reduction to the wild salmon stocks. Finally the true reason is in black and white! Again the point is what we shall do with these findings.

For example is it too late for the Swedish Baltic salmon, maybe not. It could be said that there is a slither of hope but we must act. As we already know that elected ministers are slow to act with in this field. Time and time again they need to be whipped into action in order to come to a conclusion. History has proven that they are slow to implement any sort of action plan. Bureaucrats in their slow manner destroy any hope of logical action. This is not helped by the fact that many action groups are too small to be heard or the fact that these men in their ivory towers are too far away from the grass roots to hear. The problems wild salmon face should be paramount but it takes no more than a month before the subject is forgotten.

How do we solve the problem?

I have yet to suggest what we can do. I believe the best place to start is to form a united Scandinavian salmon organization. This will enable all parties involved to have an avenue in which to voice their opinions. This could aid cross boarder discussions. An important aspect is that the separate countries that host the wild population can find procedures that are tailored to the local needs. Currently

we are split into small groups that lack any form of communication. This is only hindering progress to form a united plan for all of the counties that are effect by the conclusions of the report. We need to be united into one front and speak with one voice. This will enable us to focus and target the problems that need solving.

Sports fishermen, naturalist, marine biologist in theory can gather under the same roof. Currently Belona, W.W.F, Greenpeace, all organization both private and those from the government sector do a fantastic job. Yet what is lacking is a united project leader that can bond all the interest group to form one voice and fight for wild salmon. This leader needs to be single minded and forthright in his goals. The “chosen one” needs to be loyal and not influenced by double morals.

Dialog and the politics of compromise are the reason that wild salmon are threatened today. This process has proven to be a complete failure, what is needed is a 180 degree swing. Clearly we feel bitter and powerless. So why stand there with your arms crossed looking from the side lines. Maybe not everyone does this, but the work done by local groups is isolated and not part of a common goal. No longer can we find excuses or sweep the problem under the mat. These actions lead to us contributing to the over all failure.

A total Scandinavian Salmon organisation will not succeed without a platform in which to all parties are united. Without support and boundless efforts will this form of group fail as well? Think about it for one second.... We must never forget that time is ticking, the Atlantic salmon are fighting for their future. Can we accept that each year millions of farmed salmon are “released” into the sea. This will be the genetic death of the wild population.

If this is what we want then that is fine. We need not stress the fisheries and environment ministers will do their best to take care of the problem. We need not to lift a finger. They will legislate to the point that Atlantic salmon can be found only in “put and take” lakes. The Norwegian fisheries minister could be said to be hand in hand with the aqua farming industry. (Which has only one goal, money first and conservation later).

The Norwegian Salmon Association is now ready to take up the fight for wild salmon. If your group is interested in attacking this problem head on then just contact NSA. How we act and what we do can mean the difference to the future of wild salmon. If you have any question just contact me, Petru Dima, at www.norwegian-salmon.com home site.

Preserve the wild salmon – don't buy farmed salmon!