



Collaboration for
Atlantic Salmon Tomorrow

Wild Atlantic Salmon Disaster

An Open Letter to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO)

On October 25, 2017, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), with the consent of First Nations, saved only 40 of 600 wild Atlantic salmon from the Miramichi Salmon Association (MSA) hatchery at South Esk. A further 7500 younger fish are growing in the hatchery and due for release in the next two years. All these fish represent 28 million eggs – the next generation of salmon for the river – that today are also at risk. This is all despite DFO's approval in May 2015 to collect and grow the wild Atlantic salmon in the hatchery.

The collected wild Atlantic salmon smolt were part of the CAST (Collaboration for Atlantic Salmon Tomorrow) "head start" research initiative at the MSA hatchery. This program would allow small salmon to mature to adults and spawn in native rivers and streams to help recover dwindling populations. Science tells us that 97% of tiny young smolt do not survive the trip from the river to the ocean and back. CAST believed the head start program could make a positive difference like it has on the Upper Salmon River near Fundy National Park, as well as the Tobique River.

Since February of 2015 CAST has submitted 5 updates of its proposal to DFO. The final 41 page document was the result of feedback from all stakeholders. In April 2017 CAST was pleased to receive the following email feedback from DFO: "... this is the kind of package we have been hoping to see for a while" and "... a complete package for sure."

In recent media reports, DFO has suggested CAST did not comply with a peer review. While we want no quarrel with DFO we do want to be clear that CAST has always agreed with an independent scientific peer review prior to release of fish. We have expressed this in writing several times.

On June 29, 2017 DFO wrote to CAST and UNB suggesting a "lite review" and the release of 600 fish, followed by a more fulsome review in the fall. The "lite review" was requested by DFO because they were dealing with multiple right whale deaths in the Gulf of St. Lawrence at the time. CAST agreed to the review. During the months that followed the fish were maturing in the Miramichi hatchery for release this month.

On September 25, 2017 DFO advised they would not approve the release of the fish at the Miramichi hatchery.

CAST is a unique New Brunswick organization that includes scientists, conservation groups, government and industry volunteers. The common ground we share is our commitment to save and strengthen wild Atlantic salmon populations. Funding for CAST research comes from federal, provincial and industry partners. CAST has invested time, talent and significant financial resources to support four research projects by eleven respected, world-class scientists from UNB and the University of Laval.

CAST values the knowledge and contribution of First Nations. Dozens of meetings involving First Nations have occurred since April 2015. First Nations community members are part of the scientific advisory team and the research team on the river. One third of the full-time team at the Miramichi hatchery are from First Nations.

CAST is now at a crossroads. No amount of passion, science and funding to save wild Atlantic salmon can overcome DFO's mixed messages and last minute rejection. We can't save wild Atlantic salmon without DFO support.

CAST remains committed to saving wild Atlantic salmon. We know we can't do it without First Nations and DFO. We are asking DFO for clarity. Give CAST a clear path on how we proceed with future work so that we are not wasting time, talent and money. We need clear direction from DFO within the next 30 days to determine the future of CAST.



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