

Experts: Fish farm should be stopped

By **BEVERLEY WARE**

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PORT MOUTON — Community opposition to a fish farm proposed for Port Mouton Bay continues to grow and a couple of oceanographers say they have the science to prove the project should be nixed.

Ron Loucks and his wife, Ruth Smith, are physical oceanographers.

Ms. Smith was born and brought up on Port Mouton Bay and the couple owns the family home there, though they run their oceanographic consulting firm out of Halifax.

While not biologists, their specialty is ocean currents and tides and marine ecosystems.

After months of study, they say they can show the bay cannot handle another fish farm.

"(The information) is telling us Port Mouton Bay doesn't flush well," said Mr. Loucks of R.H. Loucks Oceanology Ltd.

Aqua Fish Farms of L'Etang, N.B., already has an eight-hectare salmon farm off Spectacle Islands in Queens County. The company has applied to open a second 29-hectare salmon farm about three kilometres away, just west of Port Mouton Island. It would be the largest salmon farm in Nova Scotia.

Queens regional council, Queens MLA Vicki Conrad and South Shore-St. Margarets MP Gerald Keddy all oppose the new farm.

Natalie Webster, a provincial fisheries and aquaculture spokeswoman, said the proposal is out of the province's hands at the moment as the federal fisheries department carries out its assessment in conjunction with other federal and provincial agencies.

Transport Canada is heading up the environmental assessment. Spokesman Steve Bone said it is now reviewing the environmental impact statement submitted by the fish farm operators.

Mr. Loucks said he and his wife are so concerned about the proposed farm they decided to do some studies, with the help of local fishermen and residents.

They released seabed drifters, which are lightly weighted plastic containers that get carried with the current.

Lobster fishermen set them in the water and residents combed the beaches each day to see if they washed up.

"If we retrieved them onshore, it would raise the likelihood that fish farm waste would also make it to shore," said Mr. Loucks. "It is not conclusive, but it raises the likelihood."

Five turned up, two at the Kejimkujik Seaside Adjunct, one at Bull Point, one at Carters Beach and another at Summerville Provincial Park.

"It told us exactly what the fishermen had said," Mr. Loucks said. Fishermen also set drogues in the water — floats with a little sail that trace the tide cycle. Mr. Loucks said they showed the water recirculates and doesn't flush well.

"The water just circulated locally, it loitered."

Port Mouton Bay is also subject to a shellfish closure at the moment after dozens of dead crabs washed ashore and clams were found contaminated with a toxin.

"We're having a hard summer in the bay," and while Mr. Loucks said there's no evidence linking the shellfish contamination to the existing fish farm, "we're quite concerned and we are alert to it."

Aqua Fish Farms owner Ian Hamilton has said he is aware of residents' concerns and he wants to work with them to allay their fears. He said he wants the expansion to create more jobs in the area and to be better stewards of the environment.

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