

## Coalition seeks fish-farm help

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By Judith Lavoie, Times Colonist

A coalition of U.S. and Canadian conservation groups and First Nations are asking for international help in dealing with fish farms off the B.C. coast.

A formal petition was filed this week with a North American Free Trade Agreement panel requesting an international investigation into Canada's failure to protect wild salmon in B.C. from disease and parasites, which, opponents claim, come from salmon farms.

The petition, which is looking for enforcement of Canada's Fisheries Act, has been submitted to the Commission for Environmental Cooperation, but it is not known when a decision will be made.

The organizations behind the petition are the Center for Biological Diversity, Pacific Coast Wild Salmon Society, the northern Vancouver Island Kwikwasu'tinuxw Haxwa'mis First Nation and Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations.

Kwikwasu'tinuxw Haxwa'mis Chief Bob Chamberlin said B.C. First Nations leaders receive little help from the Canadian government in dealing with fish farms in traditional waters, so it is time to appeal for help from the international community. "It's another opportunity to try and have our concerns heard.

If we are not able to find satisfaction from the federal government, we need to go to the international stage to pressure Canada to do something," said Chamberlin, who is also vice-president of the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs.

There are 27 net pens in the bands' traditional territories, even though the communities are opposed to open net pens, Chamberlin said. The pens are situated in the primary exit areas for wild salmon, leading to concerns about their role in the decline of wild runs, Chamberlin said.

"Fish farms in Canada are an unholy marriage between various levels of the Canadian government and foreign-owned companies," he said.

Zeke Grader, director of the U.S.-based Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations, said the Canadian government is showing disregard for wild salmon stocks. "Salmon feedlots put wild salmon, the communities that depend on them, a billion-dollar fishing industry, tens of thousands of fishing jobs and our nations' shared natural heritage at risk of extinction," he said.

Salmon farmers say the industry is environmentally sustainable and provides direct jobs for 2,800 British Columbians.

A spokesman for Fisheries and Oceans Canada was not available