



Mr. Erik Solheim, Minister
Ministry of Environment
P.B. 8013 Dep
0030 Oslo -
Norway

February 23, 2011

Dear Minister Solheim,

In your letter of October 8th, you state your views that the new salmon regulations in Norway will contribute to improved return, reproduction and stronger efforts to meet spawning targets. Can you provide some evidence? We cannot find any Norwegian scientists that substantiate your belief.

Last week a new disaster hit Norway's wild salmon stocks when 175.000 or more farmed salmon escaped their cages in the Trondheim fjord near the island of Hitra. The lack of supervision that allowed the escape to escalate could not have occurred in a worse place. The genetic damage that will be done when these domesticated fish interbreed with the limited numbers of wild fish will put at risk Norway's only serious restorative programme for its salmon stocks. What advice or consolation can you offer the people across the world who have invested in excess of NOK 100-million in conservation measures in your country? Scientific support for your pronouncement?

For the last five years a private sector rescue operation has been running to restore the once magnificent wild salmon in 43 rivers that empty into the Trondheim fjord. Supported by NASF and its coalition partners, a local conservation group called Elevene rundt Trondheimfjorden has financed a very successful compensation agreement with netsmen that has saved no less than 200,000 wild salmon. The increased spawning numbers have raised hopes that the Trondheim area would regain its former reputation as the world's No 1 angling destination for Atlantic salmon and that the influx of angling tourists would provide a great economic backbone for the rural community.

Last week's escape is Trøndelag biggest fish farming failure yet. It is a direct result of the refusal of the farmers to meet basic criteria for effective technology and sustainability. Your fishery minister claims Norway has the most effective fish farm regulations but the truth is that Norway is actually the scene of the industry's biggest failures.

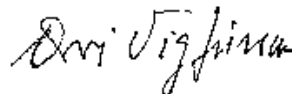
The establishment of salmon fish farms in the vicinity of salmon rivers is condemned by scientists and conservationists everywhere. The intensive concentrations of penned fish seriously pollute the water with excrement, chemicals and medicines. The enclosures also attract and create swarms of sea lice and other sub-lethal parasites and predators. These then attack young wild salmon as they migrate from nearby rivers.

Though salmon farming is a relatively modern industry it already has a disgraceful history of mass escapes, diseases and pollution. When these artificially raised fish escape they enter rivers and destroy the genetic purity of the native wild fish by mating with them. Wild salmon have evolved to travel thousands of miles during their migrations. The introduction of the genes of fish that have been specifically selected and bred for life in captivity has been shown to reduce the capability of the offspring to survive in the wild. There are now relatively few wild Atlantic salmon left in the rivers of Norway and these precious survivors will simply be unable to prosper in the face of the impact of these mismanaged fish farms.

Do you not agree that Norway should now review its inspection and regulatory regime as well as the overall technology applied, as a matter of urgency? This is the only way to introduce whatever improvements are necessary to make the fish farming industry an environmentally acceptable component of your country's economy?

We can well understand Norway developing food for the world through extensive aquaculture. But often we forget about the biological diversity we inherited and we need to protect. There is so much your ministry could do to improve the salmon environment but does not seem to be on the agenda. Wild salmon rivers and the aquaculture industry are not exclusive and need not be in competition. Instead they could share biological and economic values and common principles of justice and progress.

Sincerely,



Orri Vigfússon

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