With the federal government poised to make its decision on the Enbridge Northern Gateway Pipeline within the next few weeks, we found it interesting to note how that same government reacted to a U.S. proposal for a tanker route passing through Canadian waters in Passamaquoddy Bay, New Brunswick. Downeast LNG is a proposed export terminal in Maine. Their preferred tanker route bypasses critical habitat for North Atlantic right whales and would see the tankers navigating a narrow channel with a bend. Sound familiar? But in New Brunswick, Conservative MP Greg Thompson leapt to the assistance of project opponents. Soon, the entire Cabinet was explaining Canada’s vehement opposition to the project. Gary Doer, Canada’s ambassador to the U.S., stated: “Canada continues to have serious concerns with the proposal to construct an LNG terminal on the Maine side of Passamaquoddy Bay. These concerns relate to the environmental, navigational and safety risks as well as the adverse economic consequences arising from the passage of LNG tankers through Head Harbour Passage, New Brunswick, which the Government of Canada opposes.”

Maxime Bernier, Canada’s new minister of foreign affairs, assured a citizens’ group that “Canada is strongly opposed to the prospect of LNG supertankers navigating the treacherous waters that lead into Passamaquoddy Bay between Maine and New Brunswick.”

In 2006, Stephen Harper said, “… there are well-founded concerns about the construction and operation of LNG terminals in ecologically-sensitive areas like Passamaquoddy Bay.”

Continued on page 8
It just gets worse, the deeper you dig.

Bad enough that the government’s down-listing of humpback whales was accomplished just in time to make way for the Enbridge Northern Gateway pipeline. Now it appears that the ‘independent scientist’ retained to write the science advice for the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) was in fact the same person retained by Enbridge, and now Kinder Morgan, to provide evidence in support of their pipeline and tanker projects.

Just say you’re the government and you’re looking for a humpback whale expert to write an opinion about the state of their recovery for COSEWIC. Do you ask one of the 19 researchers who just last year completed and published a comprehensive investigation of the North Pacific humpback populations? Or do you ask Andrea Ahrens, a Stantec employee with a M.Sc., living in Gainsville, Florida, whose sole contribution to humpback literature is a paper, published in 2008, that analyzes humpback whale population numbers using photographs? And who happens to have been retained by both Enbridge and Kinder Morgan.

From Ms. Ahrens’ Linked In profile: “She serves as an advisor for the Canadian North Pacific Humpback Whale Recovery Team, co-authored the Draft Recovery Strategy, and wrote the COSEWIC Assessment and Status Report on the Humpback Whale in Canada.” You guessed correctly.

Odd that she didn’t mention her retainers when writing an opinion piece for the Vancouver Sun defending the humpback decision. Equally odd that Andrew Trites’ spirited but not especially scientific defence of the COSEWIC decision and his former student (“Let’s say every whale in the Douglas Channel is run over; you would probably never even notice it in terms of the recovery of whales on this coast.”) refers repeatedly to the independence of COSEWIC.

Trites and Ahrens may insist that there is no conflict in working for both the government that is supposed to protect whales and the companies whose ambitions will harm them. And perhaps there is none: the government has repeatedly signalled an overriding ambition of its own, to approve pipeline and tanker projects that will impact whale habitat. You would expect them to be a little more forthcoming about the author behind the downlisting recommendation, though, if it were truly so innocuous.

At Living Oceans we believe the public—and the whales—deserve better.

Karen Wristen,
Executive Director

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Living Oceans is working to ensure the long-term health of the ocean and coastal communities of Canada. We believe that people are part of the environment and that we can build sustainable communities by protecting coastal ecosystems today.

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Another season of Clear the Coast is underway around Northern Vancouver Island. We’ve already been busy this spring working with local volunteers to remove marine debris and improve ocean health along this rugged shoreline.

Will Soltau, Clear the Coast Project Coordinator, is organizing volunteer cleanups throughout our Clear the Coast study area. That includes the annual June 8 Oceans Day cleanup of our local shorelines on Malcolm Island. Those interested in volunteering should contact Will at our Sointula office.

Sea Otter Cove

A team of three ventured out by boat to the west side of Vancouver Island in late April to assist a shore crew with the salvage of another Japanese skiff near Cape Palmerston that was most likely swept to sea during the devastating tsunami that hit Japan in 2011. The skiff was found to be in good condition and was refloated and taken to a more secure location.

The weather turned sour on the way to the cape so the boat crew took shelter in the protected waters of Sea Otter Cove. The three volunteers were shocked at the accumulation of debris around the shores of this important wildlife habitat within the Cape Scott Provincial Park. They paddled ashore in a small dingy and found everything from a refrigerator to thousands of plastic bottles to another broken skiff and derelict fishing nets that stretched across the intertidal zone, ready to snare mammals, fish and birds. They gathered up what debris they could, vowing to return this summer with more volunteers and better equipment to tackle the problem.

Robson Bight

On the other side of Vancouver Island, Will and three volunteers from Malcolm Island joined forces with members of the ‘Namgis First Nation, Cetus Research and Conservation Society, BC Parks Rangers and other locals to attack the marine debris on the shores of the critical orca habitat of Robson Bight and Boat Bay Ecological Reserves in Johnstone Strait. The good news was that Robson Bight itself was relatively clean, but sadly, Boat Bay was once again covered with debris. The difference in the accumulation could be due in part to the different exposures of the two locations to prevailing winds and currents. A full day of hard work by over 20 volunteers netted the largest haul of debris yet for this annual cleanup.

It seems a sad fact that no matter where one goes ashore or how often and how many volunteers clean beaches, debris—mostly plastic—keeps coming. You can see where volunteers are reporting debris and clearing the coast on our interactive map. You can also become a part of the solution even if you can’t get to a beach to Clear the Coast by supporting our project with a donation.

Remember to reduce your consumption of plastic and be sure to reuse or recycle what you can’t reduce.

www.livingoceans.org/clearthecoast
Living Oceans is calling on the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to stop approving new net-cage salmon farms, in the light of a new report from University of Victoria researchers. The report estimates that farmed Atlantic salmon are present in over half of surveyed rivers and streams.

The article, *Occupancy dynamics of escaped farmed Atlantic salmon in Canadian Pacific coastal salmon streams: implications for sustained invasions*, was published in the most recent edition of the journal *Biological Invasions*.

The widespread presence of escaped farmed fish is very disturbing by itself; that startling news is compounded by the researchers’ finding that the fish show a marked preference for rivers with the highest diversity of wild salmon species. All five species of Pacific salmon may be affected, as well as steelhead and trout. B.C. is one of the few places in the world that still supports viable wild salmon populations. These fish are the keystone species of coastal ecosystems, cultures and communities, yet despite their importance we have not made it easy for them to thrive.

The report’s authors say the findings point to two possible conclusions: either the farmed fish have naturalized in the river and are reproducing; or their populations are being continually augmented by new escapes. They cited previous research that found the number of escapes reported by the B.C. salmon farming industry is greatly underestimated.

The problem is that there is simply no way to verify the industry’s data. Salmon farmers self-report escapes and at the same time, Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) does not publicly share data from the Atlantic Salmon Watch Program it operates to receive reports from fishermen, field researchers and hatchery workers.

**Industry pushing expansion**

The BC Salmon Farmers Association is keen to expand production by 43 percent by 2020, despite ongoing public concern and the recommendations of the Cohen Commission. There are at least two new site applications under consideration by the federal government. We say at least two because there are likely more, but recent changes to the federal *Fisheries Act*, the *Navigable Waters Protection Act*, and the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* have severely limited, if not completely eliminated, the public review process for fish farm applications.

This is why we are calling on DFO to put a moratorium on new net-cage farms until it can provide the public with clear evidence that Canada’s rivers are not being colonized by invasive species.

When salmon farming was introduced in Canada, fishermen and environmentalists protested that fish escaping from the net-cages posed a threat to wild stock. First DFO said escaped Atlantics couldn’t survive. Then they said they wouldn’t enter river systems. Then they said they wouldn’t spawn, but they found feral juveniles. Since then, DFO has done nothing to ease public concerns about escaped farmed Atlantics’ impact on wild salmon in Canadian rivers.

Escapes by the numbers

Open net-cages can tear and when they do, farmed salmon escape through the holes. Over one million farmed salmon escaped into B.C. waters between 1987 and 1996. There has been a dramatic reduction in the number of farmed Atlantic escapes since regulations changed and the industry began self-reporting its losses:

- 2008 - 111,000 escapes
- 2009 - 47,000*
- 2010 - 15,700**
- 2011 - 12
- 2012 - 8
- 2013 - 0

* Not reported to the public until after fishermen began catching Atlantic salmon in their nets.

** Only made public in the parent company’s quarterly report.
Earth Day, April 22nd, was a landmark day in sustainable aquaculture as Canada’s first-ever land-raised, closed-containment Atlantic salmon entered the marketplace. Sold under the brand name KUTERRA, the fish are raised in a facility that is fully owned by the ‘Namgis First Nation and located near Port McNeill, B.C. on the northern coast of Vancouver Island.

“Closed-containment aquaculture is the most sustainable way—and the only responsible way—to farm salmon on B.C.’s coast,” said Jenna Stoner, Sustainable Seafood Campaign Manager.

Closed-containment aquaculture systems create a physical barrier between the farm and the ecosystem making it fully biosecure. Environmental concerns common to open-net pen aquaculture such as farm waste, disease interaction between wild and farmed fish, chemical and antibiotic use, escapes and seal and sea lion entanglements are negated by closed-containment aquaculture.

The ‘Namgis’ innovative land-based system increased feeding efficiencies by 30 percent compared to conventional salmon farming practices. This means that fewer wild forage fish have to be caught to feed the farmed fish.

The ‘Namgis launched the farm in March 2013 to prove the economies of growing Atlantic salmon sustainably, on land. Just over a year later, the farm’s first harvested salmon are for sale at Safeway stores in Alberta and B.C. under the KUTERRA brand name, which combines ‘Namgis terms for ‘salmon’ and ‘land.’

Canada Safeway has been our SeaChoice partner since 2011 when we began working with the retailer to transition their seafood products to fully sustainable sources by the end of 2015.

Choosing green-listed “Best Choice” and avoiding red-listed seafood helps support responsible fishing and farming practices. Vote with your wallet and reward seafood providers who are doing the right thing. This helps ensure enough fish remain in the ocean to provide an abundance of seafood for years to come.

On April 28th SeaChoice and the Monterey Bay Aquarium’s Seafood Watch Program released updated assessments for open net-cage farmed Atlantic salmon from B.C., Chile, Norway and Scotland. All four regions received red rankings in their re-assessment resulting in an “avoid” recommendation by both groups.

The assessment for B.C. highlights that on-site use of antibiotic and chemicals, as well as uncertainties surrounding disease and parasite transfer between farmed and wild salmon as key ongoing concerns within the industry. Seafood Watch is currently conducting a separate assessment for open net-cage farmed Atlantic salmon from the east coast of North America, which is anticipated for release later this year.

Open net-cage farmed salmon still in the red

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Living Oceans’ Jenna Stoner was down on the wharf for the 8th annual Vancouver Spot Prawn Festival on May 10th along with hundreds of seafood lovers who showed up to buy the seasons’ first spot prawns right off the boat. Jenna teamed up with Skipper Otto to introduce these sustainable seafood enthusiasts to Skipper Otto’s Community Supported Fishery (CSF), a program that connects local fishermen and local customers for direct seafood sales all summer long.

“Buying directly from your local fishermen is better for you, better for the fisherman and better for the ocean,” said Jenna. “Initiatives like Skipper Otto’s CSF are critical to creating a more resilient and sustainable seafood system.”

Less than a decade ago, it was hard to find B.C. spot prawns in local seafood markets—they were all being exported, mostly to Asia. After eight years of concerted work started by sustainable seafood ambassador chef, Rob Clark along with local fishermen, the B.C. spot prawn has become a shining star for the province’s seafood industry.

B.C.’s spot prawn fishery is rated a “Best Choice” by SeaChoice because it’s well managed and sustainably harvested using traps that have minimal habitat impact and low bycatch rates.

CSF members buy in at the beginning of the season and receive a share of premium, wild, local, sustainably caught seafood. Members have boat-to-fork transparency; they know who caught their fish and how, when and where that was done. Fishermen can earn a sustainable livelihood, remain independent owner-operated, and continue using the small-scale, sustainable fishing practices they have used for generations. Overall, it’s a win-win-win situation!

To learn more and sign up for the 2014 fishing season at Skipper Otto’s website: www.skipperotto.com

Jenna Stoner, Sustainable Seafood Campaign Manager, at the Spot Prawn Festival at Fishermen’s Wharf at Granville Island in Vancouver.
Deep-sea coral and sponge conservation measures working

The British Columbia bottom trawl fleet wrapped up a second season of successfully reducing its impact on corals and sponges. In 2012 the bottom trawlers adopted innovative conservation measures that were developed cooperatively by the industry, Living Oceans and the David Suzuki Foundation, and then implemented by Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

Last year 250 kg of coral and sponge combined were caught in bottom trawl nets, half as much as in 2012. In the 15 years previous to 2012 the lowest annual catch reported by the B.C. groundfish bottom trawl fleet was 562 kg of coral and 322 kg of sponge.

The new management measures are the first of their kind anywhere in the world in that they provide incentive for each boat to minimize habitat damage by managing coral and sponge catch with quotas or limits, and through an ‘encounter protocol’, or a rapid-response procedure designed to inform the entire fleet of the location to avoid if a vessel brings in over 20 kg of coral or sponge in a single tow. In addition the fleet-wide risk of encountering coral and sponge has been reduced by ‘freezing the footprint’ of the fishery. After two years, the fishermen have not reported any notable difficulties and as a result, the fleet has not asked that any changes be made to the boundaries of the footprint.

The bottom trawl measures are part of our work to bring an ecosystem-based approach to managing Canada’s oceans. Ecosystem-based management takes into account human activities and our cumulative impacts on ocean biodiversity, habitat, food webs, and water quality.

SeaChoice is currently reassessing groundfish species caught by the bottom trawlers to see if their rankings can be improved in the consumers’ seafood buying guide.

Healthy coral forests and sponge reefs sustain ocean life. They are oases where young organisms hide from predators and older ones rest or hunt for prey. But deep-sea corals and sponges are fragile and are easily damaged or destroyed by destructive fishing gear such as bottom trawlers’ heavy nets.

Fishing nations take notice of Canada’s success

Living Oceans’ efforts to protect deep-sea habitat are gaining attention in other fishing nations that may have an eye to duplicating Canada’s success.

Karin Bodtker, our Mapping and Analysis Director, will be presenting a paper on her research into the success of the conservation measures at the 3rd International Marine Conservation Congress in Glasgow this August. In particular, Karin will document changes in area fished (i.e., behavioural responses by the fleet), encounter rates and total catch of corals and sponges. Karin’s research is a good fit as the congress theme is Making Marine Science Matter.
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Living Oceans Society has established the Oceans Fund at Tides Canada Foundation for the purpose of supporting research and education projects that will increase public awareness of the problems affecting our ocean and solutions that will ensure our ocean will be healthy for generations to come. Tides Canada Foundation makes grants from this fund to Canadian registered charities whose work complements this purpose.

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“well-founded concerns about ... LNG terminals in ecologically-sensitive areas" Prime Minister Harper, 2006

“this is a critical and important project” Prime Minister Harper, 2011

Note the ecological, navigational and safety risk in N.B.; whereas the Enbridge proposed route, travelling directly through whale habitat and requiring tankers to execute consecutive sharp turns, is apparently ‘responsible development.’

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