

Richard Harry of the Aboriginal Aquaculture Association speaking at the Salmon Aquaculture Dialogue in Vancouver, Canada, November 2006

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

Too often in the debate over aquaculture, the views of First Nations people and the positive impacts of aquaculture on our people get left out of the equation.

Yet many First Nations people are strong supporters of BC's salmon farming industry because we know the industry is providing important, long-term opportunities for our communities.

So today I'd like to focus my discussion on the importance of BC's sustainable aquaculture industry to many coastal First Nations communities.

Salmon aquaculture employs members of First Nations in communities such as Campbell River, Klemtu, Alert Bay, Port Hardy, Fort Rupert, Port Edward, Kitkatla, Tofino and surrounding villages in Clayoquot Sound. The industry generates more than 4,000 jobs throughout the Coast.

In First Nations communities where opportunities are often limited and unemployment high, aquaculture offers real hope and promise for job creation and sustainable economic development.

According to Statistics Canada, unemployment rates for all Aboriginal groups continue to be at least double the rate of the non-Aboriginal population.

Registered Indians have the highest unemployment rate of any Aboriginal group, at 27%.

Registered Indians have the lowest labour force participation rate of any Aboriginal group, with a rate of 54%.

First Nations living conditions or quality of life ranks 63rd, or amongst Third World conditions, according to an Indian and Northern Affairs Canada study that applied First Nations-specific statistics to the Human Development Index created by the United Nations.

According to Health Canada, a First Nations man will die 7.4 years earlier than a non-Aboriginal Canadian. A First Nations woman will die 5.2 years earlier than her non-Aboriginal counterpart (life expectancy for First Nations citizens is estimated at 68.9 years for males and 76.6 years for females).

The First Nations suicide rate is more than twice the Canadian rate. Suicide is now among the leading causes of death among First Nations between the ages of 10 and 24, with the rate estimated to be five to six times higher than that of non-Aboriginal youth.

Ten thousand First Nations students who are eligible and looking to attend postsecondary education are on waiting lists because of under-funding.

The number of post-secondary students has been declining in recent years. In 1998-99,

participation rates of Registered Indians was at a high of 27,157 but dropped to 25,075 in 2002-03.

First Nations people need better opportunities to create better futures. *Yet* in coastal British Columbia, the forest sector continues to decline as do opportunities

in the wild fishery, while tourism remains a primarily low-paying and seasonal employer. In this kind of an environment, aquaculture remains a bright light for First Nations, offering high-skill, well-paying jobs that provide enormous opportunity for our youth and allow us to maintain a thriving culture and community in the areas where we have lived since time immemorial.

For many First Nations communities, aquaculture offers a future free of poverty and full of promise.

And that promise is here and now, not in some distant, theoretical future. Faced with dire conditions, First Nations are looking for practical solutions that will allow communities to sustain themselves.

Aquaculture remains a key solution in many such communities.

Let me give you an example of aquaculture's benefit to put all of this in perspective.

During the mid-1980s, the Kitsoo First Nation, based on Swindle Island on the central coast of BC, recognized they needed to diversify their economy because of the downturn in the wild salmon fishing industry.

After extensive community discussions and analysis, the Kitsoo decided to pursue salmon farming. By 1997, given a rapidly changing industry, the Kitsoo realized they needed access to much larger financial and technical resources in order to remain competitive.

The Kitsoo began negotiations with Marine Harvest Canada and reached an agreement with the company that included maintaining strict monitoring and sustainability requirements. The result was Kitsoo Aquafarms Ltd.

Today, the Kitsoo are reaping the rewards of that strategic partnership.

More than 100 people, or 50 per cent of the Kitsoo workforce is now employed full-time in the community. This figure meets the Kitsoo's short-term goal of having one full-time job per household.

Marine Harvest, the Kitsoo and an academic institution provided an accredited six-month aquaculture training program for the community.

The program allowed Kitsoo band members to graduate with specialized, technical, in-demand skills. Graduates were then hired to work on the local salmon farms, and many have risen to acquire management positions.

The Kitasoo are strong supporters of aquaculture because they have seen its sustainable benefits first-hand.

And not just in BC, but throughout Canada, First Nation communities are particularly well-positioned to benefit from aquaculture development.

These communities often have unique access to development sites in regions where the main constraint to growth is site availability.

A preliminary analysis conducted for the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs by aquaculture and First Nations business development specialists suggested that scores of

Aboriginal communities throughout Canada could benefit from aquaculture development.

Aquaculture is also a good fit with the traditional fisheries and agricultural skills of many Aboriginal people.

Before welcoming aquaculture, First Nations' communities have conducted extensive due diligence efforts, combining scientific information with our own traditional knowledge.

We have found aquaculture to be a highly sustainable industry that sustains livelihoods, takes pressure off the wild fishery and provides a heart-healthy, affordable food for consumers year-round.

So as we engage in a discussion about the future of this most important sector, let's not ignore, forget or trivialize the great benefits aquaculture has brought to First Nations communities.

Let's instead work together to grow and sustain this important industry so that coastal and First Nations communities can have a prosperous future.

Thank you.