



Grieg Seafood BC Ltd: HSMI reo-virus information bulletin #2

This Information Bulletin #2 seeks to further update our partners on this latest piece of nonsense and non-science that has been release by anti-farming activists.

Recently Alexandra Morton, a biased anti-salmon farming activist, and related interest group, “Salmon are Sacred”, claimed that they had identified a virus that causes a syndrome called HSMI (heart and skeletal muscle inflammation) in store-bought BC salmon. This is not accurate.

1. Testing on fish removed from grocery stores may be effective for sensationalistic publicity purposes, but it is not scientifically valid as the grocery store samples degrade and become contaminated through processing, wrapping and over time.
2. The organization that ran and publicized the test results have a strong anti-salmon farming bias and agenda, and have been shown to promote false scientific information in the past.
3. The tests that were conducted, called PCR (a super sensitive DNA/RNA test), do not test for the actual virus, but are just an indicator test which then requires further follow-up analysis to confirm. This follow-up has not been done.
4. We test our stocks regularly in a controlled laboratory with clean samples, and have not found any indicators of this disease. We will continue to do so regularly.
5. Importantly, HSMI is not harmful to humans. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency has confirmed this and does not even require that positive test results be reported.

We were very disappointed with the manner that this information was portrayed by one journalist. There has been very poor reporting and no effort by the journalist concerned to seek comment from farmers or salmon vendors. The information presented was unbalanced, inaccurate, inflammatory and designed to sensationalise, not educate. Through the BC Salmon Farmers Association we were successful in having a correction issued but still felt it important to communicate to our partners our concerns.

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Background:

Viruses are common and naturally occurring. There are literally billions of different viruses that occur in the natural environment. The vast majority of these cause no disease in farmed or wild fish or humans.

PRV (piscine reo-virus) is a group of viruses that are very widely found in wild and farmed fish. The presence of a virus does not indicate disease. Our understanding is that these viruses are currently thought to be non-pathogenic (they don't cause disease).

HSMI is a syndrome that has been causing significant production issues in Norway since the late 1990's. The syndrome has been observed only in farm raised fish. It describes heart and skeletal abnormalities in affected fish. This syndrome is associated with elevated mortality.

It is thought that the syndrome is likely caused by a disease agent because of the way that the syndrome spreads through a farm population. At this stage no pathogen (or disease agent) has formally been recognised.

Recently, through a joint collaboration between an international group of scientists a novel PRV has been sequenced that is associated with some fish that have this syndrome. Not every fish that has the HSMI syndrome was shown to be carrying the virus – but the authors suggested that there was sufficient evidence to suspect that the virus is likely to be the disease agent. While there is not yet scientific agreement regarding these findings this has enabled a PCR test to be developed that can, theoretically, identify trace levels of this particular virus.

HSMI has been shown to negatively affect farm raised salmon. It has not been shown to have any negative impacts on any wild Atlantic or Pacific salmon.

HSMI does not cause ANY human health concerns.

About PCR Tests:

Polymerase Chain Reaction tests are high sensitive DNA/RNA analysis techniques that can detect tiny amounts of genetic material. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polymerase_chain_reaction)

PCR positive results do not indicate the presence of disease. PCR positive results need to be verified to confirm presence of the virus (because PCR just assesses a piece of DNA – not the whole sequence). Secondly, even if virus is present, this does not mean that the disease is present – it is possible to detect viruses with PCR when there is no clinical disease present.

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This case:

Samples were collected from store bought fish carcasses. This is not a reasonable or safe methodology as samples degrade post culling, are subject to contamination and their origin is not clear. Good quality samples need to be collected from recently dead fish and multiple organs should be assessed.

The person collecting the samples has a track record of seeking to sensationalise information in order to create unfounded concern. The person collecting the samples and publicising this information has repeatedly alleged that ISA disease has been found in BC farm raised salmon – all of these allegations have proven to be completely false.

The Canadian Food Inspection Authority (CFIA) has indicated that HSMI is not a notifiable disease and therefore they have no concerns. They confirmed that HSMI has no human health impacts.

Our stocks:

Our fish stocks are in good health. We are not seeing any unusual or unexplained mortality. HSMI syndrome is associated with elevated mortality. Our stocks are routinely assessed for their health status – we screen for disease and assess every fish that has died to determine the cause of death. We have never suspected HSMI syndrome in our stocks.

Going forward:

We will continue to screen our stocks and assess their fish health status. We will seek advice from fish health experts and the appropriate authorities on what steps, if any, are advised.

As more information comes to hand we will update this information bulletin.

Further Information:

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