



Environmental Assessment of *Marine Finfish* Aquaculture Projects



Environmental assessment is a management tool directed at identification, evaluation, and mitigation of potential impacts on important environmental values. An environmental assessment conducted under the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* is also directed at investigating how the environment can affect a project.

There are several specific environmental concerns, including cumulative environmental effects, to consider in any environmental assessment of proposed aquaculture projects. Environment Canada participates in an environmental assessment by providing knowledge and advice related to the department's mandate of pollution prevention, migratory birds, species at risk, environmental quality, and weather. Environment Canada's expertise in these areas can assist proponents and other regulatory agencies in selecting suitable sites and establishing how negative environmental impacts can be best mitigated during all phases of a project.

When considering the full project life cycle, siting and design, site preparation and installation of equipment, operation and maintenance, decommissioning and environmental management plans, emphasis should be placed on opportunities to avoid adverse environmental effects.

1. SITING AND DESIGN

...as a critical first step, identify potential constraints that could result in significant adverse environmental impacts which, in turn, could also undermine the future success of the project itself...

Activities Influencing Site Quality and Project Viability

- Point source (e.g. effluent from pipe) and non-point sources of pollution (e.g. land runoff, bank erosion)
- Current and potential water-based activities and uses (e.g. boating, swimming, fishing)
- Disposal at Sea

Presence of Migratory Birds and Species at Risk

- Environmentally significant areas (e.g. Migratory Bird Sanctuaries, National Wildlife Areas, RAMSAR sites)
- Habitats supporting species at risk
- Habitats supporting high concentrations of migratory birds, including birds which could feed on the cultured fish

Environmental Factors Influencing Site Suitability

- Water quality in relation to relevant water quality objectives and guidelines
- Sea-state, hydrology, ice dynamics and climatic information
- Plant, fish and invertebrate composition and abundance

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2. SITE PREPARATION AND INSTALLATION OF EQUIPMENT

...take advantage of existing infrastructure where possible and consider alternative construction materials, techniques and schedules...

Interaction with Migratory Birds and Species at Risk

- Timing of activities in relation to sensitive periods (e.g. nesting, migration)
- Location of activities in relation to sensitive habitats (e.g. nesting, feeding areas)

Project Activities Influencing Environmental Quality

- Disturbance and removal of soil, sediment and vegetation (e.g. construction of a dock)
- Spills or releases of hazardous products
- Solid waste

3. OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

...use best management practices reflecting opportunities to avoid adverse environmental effects including pollution prevention...

Project Effects on Environmental Quality

- Changes in sediment quality and benthic distribution and abundance
- Changes in water quality (e.g. chemical and nutrient loading)

Interaction with Migratory Birds and Species at Risk

- Disturbance and changes in bird activity and distribution
- Birds feeding on the crop

4. DECOMMISSIONING

...progressively restore environmental quality at the site during all project phases...

Project Effects on Environmental Quality, Migratory Birds and Species at Risk

- Long-term and irreversible habitat degradation and contamination
- Abandonment of equipment and physical structures

5. ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT PLANS

After considering these issues and answering the questions raised, if the site is deemed appropriate, operational and environmental management plans should be developed. These plans should be based on the necessary mitigation and follow up measures identified to address and verify impact predictions.

Mitigation should be considered in a hierarchical sequence for the full project lifecycle:

Avoidance
Reduction/Minimization
Compensation

Incorporation of mitigation measures and best management practices will help ensure that the aquaculture facility is designed, operated, maintained and decommissioned, in an environmentally sustainable manner.

For more detailed information, please refer to the document Environmental Assessment of Marine Finfish Aquaculture Projects: Guidelines for Consideration of Environment Canada Expertise or contact:

Environmental Assessment Section Atlantic Region
Environmental Assessment Section Québec Region
Environmental Assessment Section Pacific and Yukon

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