

The Pristine Coast traces salmon farming's trail of broken promises, environmental threats

geoffmeggs.ca/2014/10/12/the-pristine-coast-traces-salmon-farmings-trail-of-broken-promises-environmental-threats/

Given the relative abundance of BC's wild salmon stocks in the 1970s, it was never clear why salmon farming should even be a consideration. We had annual wild salmon harvests worth hundreds of millions of dollars that employed thousands of people coastwide, exporting smoked, fresh, frozen and canned salmon around the world.

But salmon farming burst on this coast like a storm in the early 1980s, riding on promises of year-round production, massive job opportunities and an alternative to intensified fishing on weaker wild stocks. The farms, it was said, would expand the existing industry and the environmental risks? There weren't any.

How wrong those forecasts were is carefully laid bare in [Scott Renyard's *The Pristine Coast*](#), a compelling documentary that [premiered at VIFF](#) and gained one of the largest festival audiences. As editor of *The Fisherman*, the newspaper of the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union, I covered those early years and was interviewed by Renyard for the film.

Renyard has pulled together remarkable footage, some of it 30 years old, from the earliest days of the industry, as well as the recollections of some pioneers. It's all here: the massive fish kills, the successful battle by farmers' to get access to wild chinook eggs, the disease outbreaks, the seabed pollution, the explosion of sea lice and much more.

Even more impressive is Renyard's careful examination of how netpen aquaculture may be linked to depressed stocks in the fisheries of several oceans and the long-term consequences for the capacity of the marine environment to absorb carbon dioxide, an important factor in managing climate change.

It's exciting, as a journalist, to ring the alarm about potential risks of new developments, but discouraging, years later, to see those threats come true. I had that feeling this morning as I saw Renyard's film today for the first time, but found myself buoyed by the footage he also included of Alexandra Morton's continued campaign to rein the industry in, a fight supported by thousands of British Columbians.