

LD 620
Lawrence Reichard

Senator Dill, Representative Hickman and members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee:

Good afternoon. My name is Lawrence Reichard. I live in Belfast, and I am a freelance journalist. I have done extensive work on plans by the Norwegian company Nordic Aquafarms to build in Belfast one of the largest industrial salmon farms in the world, and in September and October of last year I traveled to Norway and Denmark to look at Nordic Aquafarms' operations in those countries.

While researching this issue, I learned that one concern about industrial fish farms is that fish can escape and cause quite serious problems. Among these possible problems is the spreading to wild fish populations of illnesses and viruses that are rare or non-existent in open water and for which wild fish populations have little or no resistance. The introduction of such illnesses and or viruses can wreak havoc with wild fish populations.

Farm fish would likely breed with wild fish and produce weaker fish less able to survive in open water. Farm fish would likely compete with wild fish for prime spawning grounds, and would likely destroy wild-fish eggs.

Since it first announced its Belfast plans, Nordic Aquafarms has said repeatedly that it would be impossible for fish to escape from its land-based facility. In one of its public information meetings, Nordic Aquafarms scoffed at this idea, saying that a fish would have to travel overland to reach open water.

But I have spoken with highly experienced aquaculture experts who say otherwise. I interviewed Prof. Dr. Are Nyland, who has taught at Norway's University of Bergen for 30 years. Dr. Nyland told me that if there are problems with illness, disease, bacteria or viruses in on-land industrial

fish farms, fish tanks will have to be drained and cleaned, and fish can escape during this process, particularly when the fish are young and very small. Filters designed to stop fish escape can tear, and mistakes can happen.

Dr. Nyland said viruses can get out of land-based plants and spread to open water, and in fact Nordic Aquafarms CEO Erik Heim told me the same thing in his office in Fredrikstad, Norway on September 19, 2018, though Nordic Aquafarms has said differently on various occasions.

As a resident of Belfast and of Maine, and as a journalist who has worked extensively on this issue, I support LD 620. I believe LD 620 is an important step in protecting the Gulf of Maine from the potentially devastating effects of open-pen and land-based industrial fish farms.

I am more than happy to answer any questions, either now or at a later time. Thank you very much for your time and attention.