

# Morton Makes Clear Statement

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~ by **John Meadows** -

I recently had a conversation with Alexandra Morton for the Ripple and by the time I hung up the phone, all I could think was “Wow, this is a very determined person!”

Morton feels the federal and provincial government are covering up the true situation with European viruses in BC salmon and that the result could be devastating. Despite massive outbreaks of viral diseases in salmon feedlots around the world that are run by the same companies, using the same salmon stocks as they have brought into BC, the Province of BC and Canada have never monitored for these viruses in wild salmon. Morton admits she is an unlikely person to do this work, and thanks many people of the North Island who have helped her. She has uncovered a festering mess that nobody is eager to clean up.



While Canada regulates much of the salmon feedlot industry, the provincial government is the landlord because they issue the licences of occupation for each site. Thus it is the province that decides which wild salmon are exposed to feedlot diseases. They could clear entire salmon migration routes if they wanted to.



While the Social Credit government launched this nightmare onto the BC coast, it was the NDP who implemented it. The NDP granted most of the tenures, so it is fitting that they will be holding the ball when the science matures to the point where the true scope of the damage can be seen. Morton was talking to NDP politicians Moe Sihota, Corky Evens, and Glen Clark way back in the early 1990s because the science coming out of Norway was already a red flag. Morton told me she tried to stop them from putting Atlantic salmon feedlots on the major wild salmon migration routes. But they plugged virtually every route. Here's a question: How many people do you know that still run to Kingcome or Knight Inlet for spring salmon in April and May since the salmon feedlots appeared around here?

Morton is fair about the past, saying the NDP didn't know much about the impact of salmon feedlots when they were in power last time. But she has run out of patience because she believes wild salmon are running out of time. The viruses she is tracking have wreaked havoc everywhere Atlantic salmon are raised in feedlots. And — this is the only place they are raised amongst large populations of wild salmon, so the stakes are far higher here.

A few months ago, Alex, her Vancouver lawyer, Anissa Reed and a few others sat down with Adrian Dix and explained the Cohen findings, the current findings, and the coverup (see [www.salmonconfidential.ca](http://www.salmonconfidential.ca)). They explained to Dix that he would have the power to stop renewing salmon feedlot tenures if he forms government. They explained he would have the power to fix this. A few weeks later a friend and colleague of Morton, Skwah First Nation elder Eddie Gardner, asked Dix if he would revoke salmon feedlot licences if he got elected. Dix reportedly said salmon

feedlots were a federal jurisdiction – end of subject. Knowing she had personally told Dix the province has the power over licences, Morton was alarmed – very alarmed. And as many people know, an 'alarmed' Alex Morton means something is definitely going to happen as a result.

Morton said in our interview, "I wrote many NDP MLAs to ask them the same question – Do you take European viruses seriously in BC salmon? These are people who have walked with me, posed with me, shared podiums with me on this issue and all I got back was silence. People say, "Alex, the NDP will do the right thing." I reply: "Ask them." Then they call me back and say: "You were right to be worried."

In one reply Rob Flemming suggested the NDP would work with DFO on this. "But DFO is a huge part of the problem because they withheld crucial European disease information in Fraser sockeye from the Cohen Commission and that verges on fraud," said Morton. "It probably is fraud, given that the Commission specifically requested that all information on disease, aquaculture and the Fraser sockeye be produced and shown at the inquiry."

"I know the NDP understand the issue," says Morton. "Michael Sather, their Fisheries Critic, sat through the Cohen Commission and he saw what happened there. Claire Trevena and many others were on a committee that recommended getting salmon feedlots out of the ocean by a date that is long past. I think they are afraid of being seen as bad for business. This has nothing to do with salmon. This is all about optics. They remind me of the time my Jack Russell terrier treed a bear. The NDP are running scared from a yappy, dirty little industry that is all bark and bite. There is nothing big about them."



Morton sees the wild salmon economy as much larger than Norwegian feedlots. The \$1 billion dollar wilderness tourism industry, fishing and the forests that depend on salmon to grow are the backbone of the North Island economy. “The people of the First Nations have eaten wild salmon for so long that they are essential to their well-being”, said Morton.

“So”, says Morton, “if the NDP don’t have what it takes to stand up to the three Norwegian companies that have made themselves at home here, I am thinking hard about standing for election as MLA for the North Island. If the NDP can’t risk standing up for wild salmon, I am afraid for democracy. I saw what the 2010 sockeye return did for the North Island. Talk about a stimulus package! WOW.”

Morton knows that if she does this, and wins, BC will lose a voice for wild salmon. So she is hoping she can support either Claire Trevena following a commitment from the NDP to take European viruses seriously, or a Green Party candidate if one decides to run in this riding. The Green Party has adopted a salmon feedlot policy that would protect wild salmon from salmon feedlots. <http://www.greenparty.bc.ca/fisheries>

“I understand salmon are not everything, but when governments talk about The Economy, I don’t think they are talking about us. Government policy squashed the life out of Echo Bay with a couple of policies that were very bad for us. Today there are only eight people left and 27 Norwegian feedlots. Is that the vision for the rest of this riding? We knew what we needed to thrive and I feel the communities of Port Hardy, Quatsino, Port Alice, Kingcome, Gwayasdums, Sointula, Alert Bay, Campbell River and Port McNeill know too.

People produce economic activity naturally. They are like the salmon. Allow them what they need to survive and they can do wonders. Big industry is always going to be part of the picture, but it shouldn’t be at the expense of everything and everyone else. Because as we know, when they walk away, they leave communities in ruins. I feel the North Island is a place of incredible opportunity and a great way of life. Government has to do far better for us.”

