



E: info@mtcookalpinesalmon.com

M: +64 21 370 039

F: +64 3 435 0085

A: Tekapo-Pukaki Hydro Canal, Twizel

P: PO Box 761, Queenstown

www.mtcookalpinesalmon.com

MEDIA RELEASE

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Salmon Farming shown to have no impact on water quality over the last 18 years

The Right Honourable James Bolger ONZ, Chairman of Mt. Cook Alpine Salmon Limited, today released results of a study on the effect of salmon farming on water quality of the Ohau and Tekapo Canals over the past 18 years.

“I’m very pleased to say that the study shows there has been no effect on water quality from salmon farming on these canals over the last 18 years.”

“This news should be welcomed by the region, as salmon farming in the Upper Waitaki catchment is set to drive economic growth in the region over the next decade,” Mr Bolger says.

Mr Bolger says he requested an update on the study when he became Chairman. “It seemed eminently sensible for Mt. Cook Alpine Salmon to produce the report, given that it promotes and sells its produce into the top-end of the world market based on the purity of the alpine water the salmon swim in.

“Water quality is our primary concern,” he says.

Mr Bolger says Mt. Cook Alpine Salmon will make this data publically available on its website as part of the company’s drive to become the most eco-sustainable salmon farm in the world.

The report was completed by Terry Bradley, Professor of Aquaculture, who is one of the preeminent experts on salmon farming in the world, and is on the board of Mt. Cook Alpine Salmon as its Technical Director.

Professor Bradley says the data were collected in six-month intervals since 1993 as part of its ECAN water consent requirements.

“The historical water quality graphs clearly demonstrate that the farm at its current level of production has no effect on water quality today or at anytime in the past,” Professor Bradley says.

“We monitor the water quality above the farm, at the farm site, and below the farm; the difference between the readings is the effect the farm has on water quality. Scientifically this is so close to zero that it can be considered a nil effect,” Professor Bradley says.

“One thing to keep in mind when looking at the graphs is that some of the minor differences and blips, including readings above the farm being higher than below the farm, are because the parameters are extremely low and very close to the level of detection.”

“While we would like to think the fish are cleaning the water, it’s probably not the case,” he says.

Professor Bradley says suspended solids levels include both fine solids from feed and waste, as well as glacial flour, so varies naturally. “The above and below farm readings show no effect from the farm,” he says.

“Biological Oxygen Demand illustrates the level of nutrients being used by bacteria and these are effectively identical readings above, at and below the farm.

“Total Ammonia Nitrogen and Phosphorus are byproducts of feed utilisation and again show extremely low levels for both,” Professor Bradley says.

Professor Bradley says Nitrate Nitrogen is not produced by fish and is typically from fertilizer. “The peaks we see in the graphs might indicate some runoff from top dressing,” he says.

Professor Bradley says to put these results in context, the water quality below the farm is better than safe drinking water levels and is equivalent to any drinking water standards. “Put it this way, the quality of the water is as good as many bottled waters that consumers actually pay for,” he says.

“Even at the full production of our consents, the water quality will be well within NZ drinking water quality standards,” Professor Bradley says.

Mr Bolger says he has asked Professor Bradley to model the effects of the farm at full expansion and publish the report when it is completed in the coming weeks.

“It is very important for our brand going forward that we make this type of information freely available. We will continue to publish the ongoing water test results on the Mt. Cook Alpine Salmon website,” he says.

Mr Bolger hopes other water resource users will follow Mt. Cook Alpine Salmon’s example and make their water quality data publically available. “I believe it’s the way the world is heading and we all need to be concerned about water quality,” Mr Bolger says.

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Additional information:

Graphs attached for publication.

Results will be published on www.mtcookalpinesalmon.com

For more information contact:

Geoff Matthews
CEO
Mt. Cook Alpine Salmon Ltd
021 370 080

or

Carryn Colton
BrandCom Ltd
027 551 1202



