

UCLA

Electronic Green Journal

Title

The Aquaculture Controversy in Canada

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/81n2712t>

Journal

Electronic Green Journal, 1(32)

Author

Jenkins, David

Publication Date

2011

Copyright Information

Copyright 2011 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

Review: The Aquaculture Controversy in Canada: Activism, Policy, and Contested Science

By Nathan Young and Ralph Matthews

Reviewed by David Jenkins

Roundhouse Institute for Field Studies, USA

Young, Nathan and Matthews, Ralph. *The Aquaculture Controversy in Canada: Activism, Policy, and Contested Science*. Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 2011. 289pp. ISBN 9780774818117. US \$37.95. paper, acid-free.

The controversy surrounding Canadian aquaculture has a variety of sources. These include many perceived ills of the modern world associated with globalization, environmental degradation, loss of local control of resources, and a style of governance which tends to subordinate social and environmental policies to economic policies. At the same time, there are perceived benefits of globalization, especially in the form of local development made possible by corporate control of local resources. The local and the global become linked through government policy in an effort to encourage local resource development. *The Aquaculture Controversy* analyzes how competing views of proper governance, corporate resource exploitation, aboriginal rights, rural development, and science all influenced, and continue to influence, the development of aquaculture in Canada.

Large-scale commercial aquaculture is relatively new. Canadian commercial aquaculture, predominantly of Atlantic salmon, must compete on a global market with producers in Chile, the United Kingdom, and Norway. Twenty-five years ago there were many small and medium sized aquaculture firms competing with large firms for a share of the emerging global market. Today, two multinational companies with headquarters in Norway dominate the market. The economic stakes are high. In 2005, the U.S. import market was valued at \$1.2 billion. Ninety-three percent of Canadian exports of aquaculture salmon went to the U.S., but this represented a small fraction of the total U.S. market. Chile exported 72,000 metric tons of salmon to the U.S. in 2005; Canada exported 7,000 metric tons.

The economic incentives to develop Canadian aquaculture are mediated by neoliberal government policies, and Young and Matthews provide a brief but very useful overview of such policies. They point out that engaging in global markets privileges areas positioned for those markets, at the expense of areas less well positioned, and encourages local actors to pursue local development. In rural areas dependent on resource extraction, such development significantly increases multinational corporate power over local resources and modestly enhances local power over those same resources. The local/global relationship remains asymmetrical, a consequence of ceding increased power to global corporate concerns, even as the Canadian government promotes local development.

In this context, controversy seems inevitable. For aquaculture, which developed in the context of neoliberal policies, differing viewpoints come from scientists, who see diverse ecological consequences to coastal salmon farms, from minimal to catastrophic; environmental activists, who highlight potential ecological and social disasters resulting from salmon farms; policymakers, who insist that economic benefits of aquaculture outweigh all other concerns; First Nations, which lobby for aboriginal rights to natural resources; and the aquaculture industry, which promotes itself as a sustainable industry necessary in the global context of imperiled fisheries and economically viable in areas of rural impoverishment.

Young and Matthews argue that controversy over Canadian aquaculture remains unresolved in large measure because the issues are systemic and include local/global relations, curbs to industry, competing knowledge claims, indigenous rights, and the ability of government to weigh economic interests against the obligation to protect the environment.

The next step is to compare regimes of governance, economic growth, environmental protection, local/global relations, and cultural contexts in Chile, Norway, the United Kingdom, and Canada, as they relate to aquaculture. This book provides a strong basis for a larger comparative study.

David Jenkins. <dvdjenkins@hotmail.com>, Roundhouse Institute for Field Studies, 32 Magean St., Brunswick, Maine 04011. TEL: 1-207-713-7079.

Electronic Green Journal, Issue 32, Fall 2011, ISSN:1076-7975