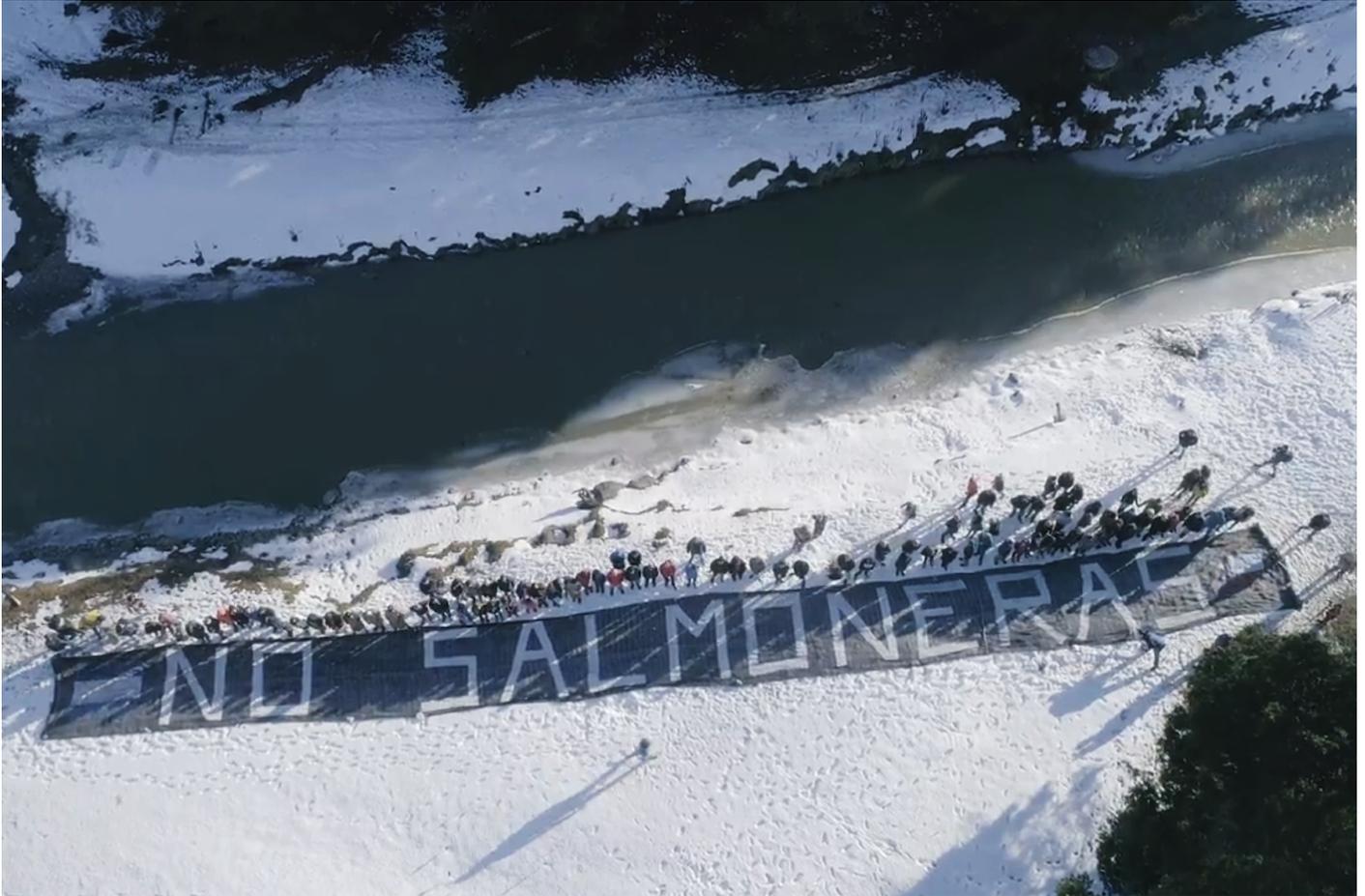


Argentina says no to salmon farming

Wednesday, 30 June 2021 16:57 | Environment



Ushuaia, Argentina. Photos: Rewilding Argentina

Rewilding Argentina, press release, June 30, 2021 - Tierra del Fuego, Argentina's southernmost province, approved a bill today that bans salmon farming in open net pens. The prohibition of this industry, which threatens not only the environment but also its inhabitant's health and economy, suited the country before the eyes of the world as the first to advance a decision of such magnitude regarding intensive fishing industry.

Salmon farming is the intensive farming and harvesting of salmonids, under controlled conditions, for commercial purposes. In this type of production, salmon are fattened in "floating cages" usually located in bays and fjords along the coasts—a technique first conceived in Norway during the late 1960s that grew exponentially in the last decades. Intensive salmon farming in cages is only possible in a given type of ecosystem (fragile, pristine, extremely rich in biodiversity cold water environments), which in recent years has generated extreme pressure over places where its development is viable. Although the favored economic groups are a petty minority, they have managed to expand salmon farming uncontrollably and, according to Just Economics's [report](#), they seek to fivefold the industry over the next 10 years.

Facing social rejection all over the main producing countries—and several scandals related to the lack of transparency, fish escapes and mortalities, and the improper use of antibiotics—Norway saw an opportunity to set up in Tierra del Fuego. In Argentina, the only viable location for this type of production is the pristine waters of the Beagle Channel.

In 2019, the Argentine government and the authority of Tierra del Fuego province signed an agreement with Norway to develop salmon production in cages along the province. The salmon industry was not welcomed by Tierra del Fuego inhabitants, who joined neighboring Chilean communities, various environmental organizations, and the outdoor apparel brand Patagonia (well known for its environmental activism initiatives), to raise their voices through different kind of actions and demonstrations. Such was the rejection that the government decided to put a temporary halt to the project. That's when the provincial legislator Pablo Villegas, and the current vice-governor Mónica Urquiza, presented a bill to finally ban the salmon industry by law, which was unanimously approved.



Photos: Rewilding Argentina

The number of coastal communities questioning this industry grows steadily. In the USA, Canada, Scotland, Iceland, Tasmania and even in Norway, local communities oppose to the installation of cages, and although they have long sought to remove them from their fjords and channels, this is the first time that a country has banned the industry before it is settled. Tierra del Fuego successfully anticipated and listen to society, choosing to preserve one of Earth's last pristine lungs and the identity and culture of the province, setting a precedent for the rest of the world. In this regard, legislator Pablo Villegas stated: "I think it's important to point out that the message is clear: if we work with our head and heart, with conviction, commitment, passion, and responsibility, that translates into achievements. Saying No to salmon farms is possible."

Martina Sasso, one of the leaders on Sin Azul No Hay Verde, Rewilding Argentina Foundation's marine program, founded by Kris and Douglas Tompkins, said: "This legislation confirms that if we get involved and actively work as a society based on what unites us, everything is possible. All changes are meaningful, if we can convince a legislator or a leader of our community to do things differently, we are changing the world."

Unlike other intensive extractive forms of food production, society is largely unaware of the true price of eating salmon. Farmed salmon are fed oil and smaller fish, crushed feathers, transgenic yeast, soy, and chicken fat. Contrasting to wild salmon, which get their distinctive color from feeding on krill and shrimp. Consequences of salmon farming include massive salmon mortalities, intensification of toxic algae blooms (such as red tide), introduction of exotic species, alteration of ecosystems and the loss of local fauna, the generation of "dead" zones, the entanglement of marine mammals, bacterial resistance and, of course, the impacts of the enormous socio-environmental footprint it entails.

Booker Prize-winning Australian novelist, Richard Flanagan, who's also the author of *Toxic*, a book about the salmon industry in Tasmania, stated: "Argentina has in Patagonia one of the last great places of wonder in the world. When people come to see what was saved, they will also mourn what has been lost in Chile, in Norway, in Scotland, in Canada, and my home island of Tasmania—and they will wish their governments had shown the wisdom of Argentina."



Photos: Rewilding Argentina

This policy could be a blueprint for Chile, the second largest producer of salmon in the world and with an extended history of environmental disasters and scandals. The most recent one triggered large-scale campaigns by more than 50 organizations, including Patagonia, to prevent the extension of concessions and demand the Chilean government to protect the ecosystems.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) implies that we have to start producing much more protein to sustain the world's growing population. But today we know this is not the solution but part of the problem, as it carries catastrophic consequences for the environment, society, and local economies. 25% of the planet's croplands feeds 80% of the world's population through the work of peasants, indigenous communities and family production. However, industrial agriculture controls 75% of farmlands for the production of protein and feeds only 25% of the world's population. Likewise, one third of the world's fish production is used as food for aquaculture products.

Francis Mallmann, a leading chef and activist on this cause, said: "I think we are close to a radical change in the salmon farming industry. Younger people are closer than ever. There is an ethical leitmotif that unites them without borders. They are showing us that they have very different ambitions from ours: for them, the most important thing is the planet. Stubborn and strong, step by step they will change the course of destruction. For them the planet must be a single sustainable farm, responsibly cared by all."

There are several conversations happening right now regarding new economic models, but few countries have taken concrete initiatives. By saying no to the salmon farming industry, Tierra del Fuego is showing that the urgency of the environmental crisis we are facing can be addressed through the design of policies that identify scenarios, build consensus, and define a course of action to achieve the common good over sectoral interests.



Photos: Rewilding Argentina

Alexandra Morton, an independent biologist and author of “Not on My Watch. How a Renegade Biologist Took on Government and Industry to save Wild Salmon,” stated: “Here in British Columbia I lost my community, the whales I was studying left, the wild salmon died off, and the toxic algae blooms began. I have fought this industry for 35 years. The damage to British Columbia is catastrophic. We are pushing it out of our waters, but I fear it is too late.”

Don Staniford, a scientist turned researcher, activist and head of a Global Alliance against Industrial Aquaculture, said: “I have been fighting the global salmon farming industry for over two decades and the tide is now turning against this toxic industry. Salmon cages are a malignant cancer on our coasts which urgently need to be ripped out. This is a watershed victory in Argentina which will make waves around the world. A global ban on open net cage salmon farming can help safeguard the health of our global ocean and the health of our children for generations to come.”

David Alday, representative of the Yagán community—the original inhabitants of this southernmost point of the world—from the city of Puerto Williams, that shares the Beagle Channel with Tierra del Fuego, also referred to this matter: “30 years from now, I see an abundant archipelago full of different species and surrounded by national parks, strong, with a powerful vision and a powerful message to the world about how we must care and support our nature. I see us navigating, I see us free, the artisanal fishermen doing his job as he always has done, and above all, an uninterrupted Onashaga, with nothing obstructing the landscape. Being optimistic, this area is a great example for the universe. Here, we are not fighting for a community but the positive effects of these decisions on a global level.”

Argentina's decision today shows that it is possible to work towards a new and better economic model, one that prioritizes local communities and sustainable development, preserving biodiversity and the health of the world's marine ecosystems. Perhaps it will serve as an example for other countries, an invitation to ponder, to ask themselves what it means to be a developed country, what decisions are responsible, and what success ultimately means.

Tweet



Related articles :

- [Argentina bans installation of salmon industry in national parks](#)

- Floating the Calcurrupe River
 - Millions of salmon die in the fjords of southern Chile
 - Atlantic Salmon: opportunist carnivores roaming loose in the Patagonian sea
 - Argentina's UNESCO World Heritage Site "Cueva de las Manos" declared a provincial park
-