

Paradise Lost?

The hellish expansion of salmon farming in Chile's Patagonia could threaten a hundred years of Chile-Norway relations

It is said that if there is such a thing as a salmon farming heaven, it is in Norway; whilst if there is a hell, it is in Chile. The South American country displays the worst labour standards globally for this industry. Between July 2013 and January 2019, it killed 31 of its workers. Its sanitary and environmental records are abysmal, with an abusive use of antibiotic and anti-parasite treatments, a mega-crisis of infectious salmon anaemia (ISA) virus, successive noxious and toxic algal blooms, massive dumping of dead fish into the sea and antifouling paints into lakes and rivers, along with the sinking of salmon well-boats, to name but a few of its problems.

King Harald V and Queen Sonja of Norway visited Chile in March 2019 in response to an invitation of the Chilean President, Sebastián Piñera, to commemorate 100 years of diplomatic relations between the countries.

The monarch arrived with a delegation of 60 investors who, along with the Minister of foreign affairs Ine Eriksen Soreide, and fisheries minister Harald T Nesvik, met with a wide range of state sectors, entrepreneurs and

Chile is Norway's second-most important investment market in South America. The 60 companies in Chile make Norway the largest foreign investor in Chilean industrial fisheries and salmon aquaculture.

Together, both countries control 70 per cent of the world's supply of fattened salmon, giving the Norwegian financial system and companies a major role in the current cycle of salmon farming's territorial expansion, designed to achieve annual production levels of 1.2 mn tonnes of salmon by 2032, concentrated in the biodiversity-rich and pristine ecosystems of Chilean Patagonia.

The visit of the Norwegian delegation included the staging of a Chile-Norway business leaders' summit, which featured Alf-Helge Aarskog, the executive director of the ill-reputed transnational company Marine Harvest (recently renamed Mowi), and José Ramón Gutiérrez, executive director of Multiexport Foods, 25 per cent-owned by the Japanese transnational Mitsui. Also in attendance were the directors of the industry umbrella organization, Salmón de Chile, and the executives of its technical branch, the Instituto Tecnológico del Salmón (Intesal).

King Harald V and Queen Sonja's visit to Chile's Patagonian region—formal protocol, scientific and pro-salmon lobbying aspects aside—is of enormous symbolic and strategic value for Norwegian polar interests and policy.

National production

Currently, the vast salmon industry is in the process of active territorial expansion in the Magallanes region, with an exponential growth in production which has risen from 68,000 tonnes in 2016 to 85,000 tonnes in 2018. It is projected to reach 140,000 tonnes in 2014, substantially contributing

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eminent persons from the world of culture. They also visited Punto Arenas and Puerto Williams in the Magallanes and Antarctic regions, where Antarctic and oceanic co-operation agreements were on the agenda, which are key areas of Norwegian geopolitical interest in the Southern hemisphere.

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to the goal of achieving the national production of 1.2 mn tonnes by 2032.

In a synchronized manner, the Norwegian state also seeks to extend and consolidate its presence in the waters of Argentina's Patagonian region, as demonstrated by King Harald V's visit to the Casa Rosada. During this visit, a co-operation agreement was signed by the Agro-industry Ministry with Innovation Norway to carry out a feasibility study over 2018 and 2019 on establishing industrial monoculture of salmon in the Beagle channel and the coast of Santa Cruz, Tierra del Fuego.

The salmo-industrialisation of Patagonia seeks to open up new environmentally and sanitary pristine areas to Norwegian investment, allowing this billion-dollar export-oriented industry undisturbed growth, which, in the case of Chile, will rise above 5 bn dollars annually.

As is widely known, these pristine sanitary conditions are being rapidly degraded in the adjoining Lakes (Los Lagos) and Aysen regions, where intensive salmon operations for 40 years have provoked a series of sanitary, environmental and social crises. Annual production today has reached levels of 800,000 tonnes of salmon, of which 98 per cent is exported.

As is to be expected, these dodgy agreements with Norway for salmon expansion are provoking a wide-scale rejection amongst political and social groups, citizens and environmental organizations, and Kawésqar y Yaganes communities, along with chefs and scientists. Both in Chile and Argentina, these groups are warning about the

potential sanitary and environmental impacts that the massive introduction of these carnivorous species from the Northern hemisphere could have on the pristine waters of South American Patagonia, taking into consideration the four decades of disastrous sanitary and environmental experiences in the Chiloé archipelago.

The process of expanding Norwegian investment in the salmon industry highlights the application of double environmental, sanitary, labour and social standards in Chile. A case in point is Mowi/Marine Harvest, the largest producer and exporter of salmon in the world, which acts as if the South of Chile is the 'Wild West'.

In July 2018, from its fattening centre located in Punta Redonda, 670,000 salmon escaped in the commune of Calbuco. The Chilean Economy Ministry pointed out that Mowi/Marine Harvest is the company with the largest number of salmon escapees in Chilean waters, having registered 50 events over the last eight years, involving a total of 2 mn salmon escaping into vulnerable coastal-marine ecosystems and rivers in the Lakes (Los Lagos) region.

Escaped salmon

In the 2018 escape, Mowi/Marine Harvest violated article 118 of the General Law on Fisheries and Aquaculture by not recapturing 10 per cent of the escaped salmon. In parallel, they asked the artisanal fishers of Puerto Montt to catch illegally the escaped salmon that were in the sea, which also violates the fisheries law.

A citizens' campaign to boycott industrially fattened salmon

Citizens' organizations, and coastal and indigenous communities have launched a campaign for an international boycott of the consumption of chemical salmon from industrial fattening in south Chile. Their aim is to defend life in Chilean seas, rivers, fjords and lakes, and to protect public health in the face of the growing threat of bacterial resistance provoked by the sub-standard practices of the salmon industry.

Chilean citizens welcomed the opportunity provided by the visit of King Harald and Queen Sonja to publicize the citizens' fight against the bad practices and double standards of Norwegian salmon companies in Chile.

They informed international public opinion about the urgent need to monitor and scrutinise the unethical behaviour of the salmon industry, as also to press for halting the destruction of aquatic biodiversity in Patagonia, one of the last pristine regions of the planet, home to the last canoeing Kawesqar and Yaganes communities, survivors of the genocide carried out by the nation states of Chile and Argentina about a century ago.

The campaigners reminded that the Nordic royalty, its citizens and its social movements can no longer remain indifferent to this new process of environmental destruction, genocide and cultural assimilation being pushed by large salmon companies in Patagonia owned by Chilean, Norwegian, Japanese, Canadian, German and Chinese capital.

For details see: www.salmonquimicofuera.cl

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March for the Defense of Water and Territories, Santiago, Chile in April 2019. Citizens' organizations, and coastal and indigenous communities have launched a campaign for an international boycott of the consumption of chemical salmon from industrial fattening in south Chile

What is more, they tried to cheat the Chilean government by providing false documents stemming from the irregular payment of 32 mn pesos to leaders and artisanal fishers, who had lied to a lawyer, swearing that they had undertaken an alleged 'recovery' of fish, amounting to 32,000 individual escaped Atlantic salmon from the areas surrounding the Mowi/Marine Harvest fattening centre.

Following denouncements from the Chilean Fisheries and Aquaculture Service (Sernapesca) and the Chilean Navy, an investigation was carried out by the Environmental Authority (SMA) and charges were made against this Norwegian company for infractions classified as extremely serious, constituting irreparable environmental damage.

In its turn, Nova Austral, one of the main salmon operators in the Magallanes Region, owned by Bain Capital and Altor of Norwegian, Swedish and Finnish origin, is in a process of mergers and acquisitions towards doubling its current production to reach 40,000 tonnes by 2021.

Attention must also be drawn to the two audits carried out by the

Comptroller General of the Republic in 2016 for the Fisheries and Aquaculture Subsecretariat (Subpesca), which showed that between 2013 and 2015, up to 53 per cent of the salmon-fattening centres in Magallanes reported a lack of dissolved oxygen in the water around the perimeters of the of the raft-cages, especially those belonging to the company Nova Austral. This problem arises from the excessive nitrogen and phosphorous levels caused by the very high levels of organic pollution generated by the salmon faeces and uneaten feed that builds up on the seabed.

For more

<https://www.eldesconcierto.cl/2019/03/27/amenazara-la-destructiva-expansion-de-la-industria-salmonera-los-cien-anos-de-relaciones-chileno-noruega/>
¿Amenazará la destructiva expansión de la industria salmonera los cien años de relaciones chileno-noruega?