World Wildlife Fund connects with shellfish sector at Victoria meeting

The World Wildlife Fund, headquartered in Washington, DC, held an important meeting regarding the shellfish sector of the industry in Victoria, BC last month. The meeting was aimed in part at establishing a panel of regional advisors to provide input to the Mollusc Aquaculture Dialogue, one of a series of multi-stakeholder roundtables convened by WWF to create global standards for various aquaculture species.

To date ten finfish and shellfish species have been named, with clams, oysters, mussels and scallops to come under the Mollusc Dialogue and alone to be handled separately.

“The standards,” said a spokesperson for the World Wildlife Fund, “will help minimize the key environmental and social impacts related to aquaculture.”

“Once finalized, the standards can be the basis for an aquaculture certification program. They can also be used to benchmark other standards; incorporated into existing certification programs; adopted for government programs; or, potentially, be the foundation for buyer and investment programs; and, potentially, be the basis for government programs; or, two ENGOs, and industry companies; or, one industry partner received a Synergy Award for their efforts in the area of integrated multi-trophic aquaculture (IMTA).”

Working through the University of New Brunswick (UNB), Thierry Chopin (professor of marine biology at UNB Saint John), Shawn Robinson (research scientist with Fisheries and Oceans Canada) and coral industry partners, Cooke Aquaculture Inc. and Acadian Seaplants Limited, received a 2008 Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada Synergy Award for IMTA research in the Bay of Fundy.

The research team received a $200,000 research grant and each industry partner received a Synergy research grant and each industry partner received a Synergy research fellowship (IRDF) for two years.

“Thierry is an excellent researcher and scholar and has been fortunate to work with an excellent inter-disciplinary research team,” said Dr. Geoffrey Kealey, Vice-President (research) at UNB. “The work of the research team is well known, both nationally and internationally, and they have demonstrated that IMTA is a promising aquaculture practice for the future and are most deserving of this award.”

For the past seven years, the research team has been adding mussels and seaweeds to traditional salmon–only farming operations in the Bay of Fundy. Nutrients released from the seaweeds and mussels are captured and used as food and energy for the mussels and seaweeds, while regular sampling shows that these additional crops are free from any contaminants and are of extremely high quality.

“What we are doing with IMTA is nothing less than recreating a simplified food chain within a balanced ecosystem,” said the Ecofish Point. “This very exciting research with industry is helping the entire aquaculture sector to evolve to the next level, one of efficiency and sustainability” added Dr. Robinson.

“Not only is it helping the fish farmer, it is also helping to develop more effective and advanced management policies.”

“One of the great accomplishments of the project has been getting an amendment to existing regulations to make IMTA and innovative aquaculture practices a reality in Canada, while the rest of the world is taking note of our progress,” said Dr. Chopin.

“We are extremely honoured to receive this award on behalf of the entire team,” said Drs. Chopin and Robinson. “But more importantly, we are thrilled that aquaculture research is being celebrated. This is a tremendous recognition that IMTA systems are a promising evolution in the way we will secure our seafood demand in the future.”

A team of East Coast researchers and their industry partners received at the NSERC Synergy Award for their efforts in the area of integrated multi-trophic aquaculture (IMTA). The award announcement states that the corporation provides year-round employment for up to 20 people. The Aboriginal Aquaculture Association of BC, headquartered in Campbell River under president Richard Harzy, was nominated and became a finalist for the ASTTBC Leadership Award in Technology, sponsored by the Association of Applied Science, Technologists and Engineers of BC.

The recipients of the 2008 NSERC Synergy Award (left to right): Jean-Paul Deveau, Shawn Robinson, Glenn Cooke, Thierry Chopin and Michael Szemenda.