

2023

New Brunswick Annual Sea Lice Management Report

Prepared by the Atlantic Canada Fish Farmers Association (ACFFA)

Data for this report is generated from the Fish-iTrends Decision Support System. Fish-iTrends is the data collection system developed by the Atlantic Veterinary College (AVC) at the University of Prince Edward Island for use by the Atlantic Canada salmon farming industry. This system is maintained by the AVC who acts as a third-party monitor of data submissions by salmon farmers. Provincial fish health personnel have ongoing access to this data; AVC and/or regulators perform third party audits of the salmon farm lice counts to verify accuracy in reporting.

To further support this system and ensure data accuracy, the AVC developed a sea lice monitoring certification program for farm technicians. Training helps to ensure accurate counts are based on the Sea Lice Monitoring Program, a requirement under the New Brunswick Aquaculture Act and General Regulations and the Integrated Pest Management Plan for Sea Lice.

ACRONYMS

ABMA	Aquaculture Bay Management Area
EDRs	Emergency Drug Releases
NBDAAF	New Brunswick Department of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries
DFO	Department of Fisheries and Oceans
PMRA	Pest Management Regulatory Agency
VDD	Veterinary Drugs Directorate

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

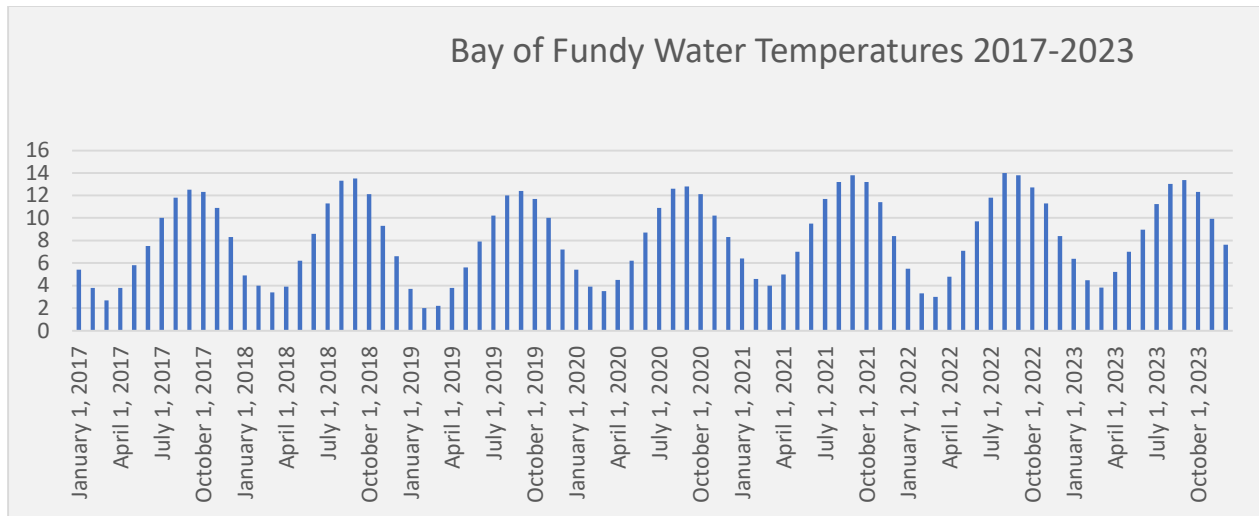
The three-year Aquaculture Bay Management Area System (ABMA) implemented in New Brunswick (See map in Appendix A) not only supports improved environmental management but it has also provided the basis to improve fish health management practices, including sea lice management. Principles within the ABMA system include:

- Mandatory fallowing of production sites and the bay management area to help break pathogen lifecycles as well as the life cycle of sea lice.
- Single year class stocking at each farm site and within each management area; preventing older farmed salmon, which may have already been exposed to pathogens / parasites in the marine environment, from transferring it to incoming smolts.

In 2023, salmon farming companies continued to develop a sea lice management and treatment strategy for each Bay Management Area, that included product rotations and synchronized treatment strategies as much as possible. Like all farmers, they relied on the professional advice of veterinarians who have access to approved products for use when animals are infected by a pathogen or threatened by parasites. All in feed sea lice treatments were authorized through a veterinarian's prescription and all therapeutic treatments were reported to federal and provincial regulators.

Water temperatures continued to be an important factor in the management of sea lice impacts on fish farmers in the Bay of Fundy. As shown in Figure 1, water temperatures in 2023 in southwest New Brunswick were not as cool in the beginning of the year as they have been in previous years (January – March) and then quickly warmed and remained warm until October. The average water temperature in February was over 4°C. Water temperatures for the Bay of Fundy averaged over 13°C August through October 2023 and once again temperatures remained above 10°C through to the end of November. December averaged just below 8°C.

Figure 1: Average monthly water temperatures for 2017-2023



This report on sea lice management is based on the 2023 data obtained through individual farm reporting and data analysis of the sea lice counts within the specific ABMAs managed through FishiTrends. The data represents the average sea lice count for adult female lice, which are indisputably the most critical life stage to control, and the life stage generally reported by other jurisdictions.

BACKGROUND

Sea lice are naturally occurring parasites that feed on the skin and mucous of both wild and farmed salmon. The salmon sea louse cannot live in the fresh water of hatcheries - therefore all smolts are free of sea lice before they are stocked on farms. However, since sea lice can pass through the netting of the marine cages, farmed salmon may become infected from sea lice in the surrounding water. Since this parasite cannot be eliminated from the marine environment, salmon farmers have developed management practices that reduce the likelihood of infection¹.

These practices include:

- Selecting new farm sites with good flushing and water current
- Ensuring production sites are emptied of all farmed fish for periods of time (fallowed).

¹ <http://www.aquaculture.ca/files/species-salmon.php>

- Allowing only farmed salmon from a single year class to be present at each farm site – this prevents older farmed salmon (who may have received the parasite from wild fish) from transferring them to incoming smolts.
- Employing bay management systems where hydrographic conditions reduce the possibility of year-class carry-over.

Increasing ocean temperatures over prolonged periods of time and later in the year are continuing to have an impact on the number of sea lice in Southwestern New Brunswick by reducing the number of weeks to reach the female adult stage by 60% (Figure 2).

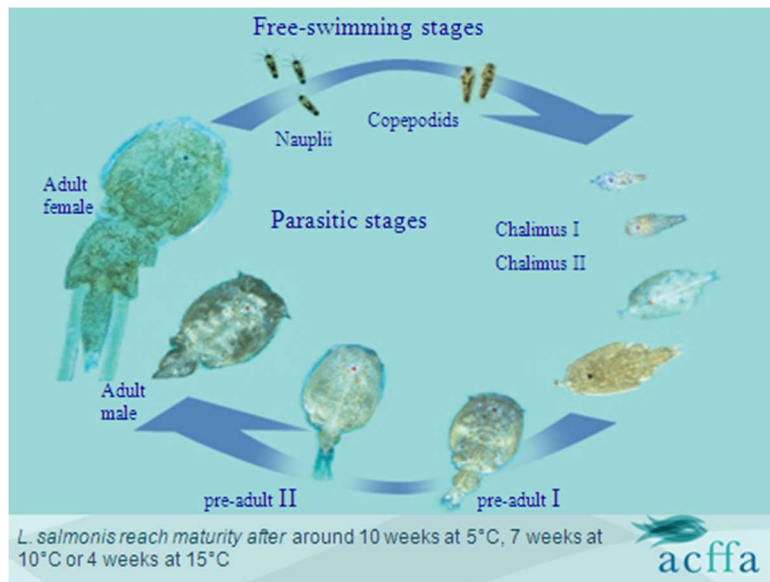


Figure 2: Maturity stages of *L. salmonis*

As a result, salmon farmers continued to invest in the development of proactive management practices to reduce the likelihood and severity of infestations. All farmed salmon enter the marine environment disease and parasite free. However, because sea lice travel on wild fish, ocean currents and even in zooplankton, they can move freely between both wild and farmed fish.

In 2000, salmon farmers around the world acquired access to an anti-parasitic therapeutic, emamectin benzoate – the active ingredient in SLICE®. This was the only product available for use in Canada until 2009.

In 2008, New Brunswick farmers observed a reduced efficacy to SLICE®. It was then that the New Brunswick salmon farming industry worked with federal and provincial governments, scientists and the National Fish Health Working Group to research and evaluate effective alternative options for controlling sea lice and promoting overall fish health management. The European aquaculture industry has had access to a variety of sea lice management tools for over a decade. Recognizing this, the Atlantic Canada salmon farming industry collaborated internationally, and continues to do so, for evaluation and research of new sea lice management opportunities. The objective is to find new tools that will augment and/or replace management practices already in place.

Efforts by salmon farmers to make real and lasting progress to support integrated pest management has been challenging. In part due to the fact that fundamental to any integrated pest management plan (IPMP) is access to a variety of treatment options. In the past, there have been challenges in getting timely authorizations and/or permits to support the evaluation or use of products under alternative delivery methods.

Canada is the only jurisdiction that requires separate approvals from companies producing the active ingredients in treatment products used in commercial sea lice treatment products. Canada still does not have access to the same products that have been used in other jurisdictions for years. Addressing sea lice impacts is complicated by environmental conditions such as high winds, salinity and water temperature; and not all products are appropriate for all life stages of lice.

Studies have shown that young pink salmon mount an effective immune response to sea lice infection². This immune response causes the lice to be shed from the salmon –protecting the young salmon from illness or death due to sea lice infection. Feed formulations have been developed, many using natural ingredients that may inhibit sea lice from attaching to farmed salmon or boost the salmon’s immune system. Immunostimulants include items like Vitamin E, β glucans from yeast, and plant extracts. Anti-attachment feeds may use glucosinolates that are biologically active compounds found in the Brassicaceae family of plants, including broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, rapeseed, mustard, and horseradish, which if ingested by vertebrates, exert health-promoting effects due to their antioxidant and detoxifying properties.

These feeds are being used in Norway and in the EU. It is of consumer interest to note that while humans can consume these feed ingredients and fish that have been fed these ingredients that are being imported for sale in Canada, they are not permitted for direct use in Canada. After more than a decade, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency has not amended their list of approved ingredients for infeed products.

In addition to issues affecting access to treatment options or functional feeds, records maintained by salmon farmers show that marine water temperatures in New Brunswick continue to increase. We began to see a trend of increases by 2 degrees centigrade above historical levels in 2009. We continue to see these high water temperatures maintained for longer periods and on average later in the year than we have seen in the past.

Historically, sea lice populations on salmon farms have been very low January through to June. To ensure that low sea lice abundance is maintained, strategic spring treatments begin in April / May where required. This minimizes the risk and ensures that any wild salmon leaving rivers are not exposed to sea lice from salmon farms. When water temperatures cool, farmers will again do a strategic final treatment in late Fall to reduce lice abundance prior to winter. The timing of treatments throughout the year is determined on an as needed basis.

CURRENT MEDICINAL SEA LICE TREATMENT OPTIONS

An Overview of International Options

There are a range of compounds available internationally for sea lice management. These include:

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Avermectins: | SLICE®, Ivermectin |
| 2. Chitin Inhibitors: | Calicide, IMVIXA |
| 3. Organophosphates: | Salmosan |
| 4. Pyrethroids: | AlphaMax, Excis |
| 5. Hydrogen Peroxide: | Interox Paramove 50, Aquaparox 50 |

These products have been available for many years in other jurisdictions including Norway, the UK and Chile. Extensive international research is available to provide data to support Canadian risk

² <http://www.aquaculture.ca/files/species-salmon.php>

assessments through Health Canada for Emergency Drug Releases (EDRs) or Emergency Registrations (ERs) pending local monitoring and surveillance data collection to complete full registrations of the products.

An Overview of Canadian Options

In Canada there is a much smaller list of available treatment options. All registered in-feed products listed below are only available through a prescription by a veterinarian. It should be noted that there have been no new sea lice treatment products approved in Canada since 2017.

The Veterinary Drugs Directorate (VDD) evaluates and monitors safety, quality and effectiveness, sets standards and promotes the prudent use of veterinary drugs administered to food-producing and companion animals. The Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) performs a similar role for topical / bath pesticide treatment products. Use of all products is reported to both federal and provincial regulators.

1. Salmosan®

Salmosan® was previously registered and administered on New Brunswick farms in the 1990s but the registration lapsed when SLICE® was introduced. The Province received an ER for Salmosan® in November 2009. This permit was subject to scientific monitoring, where sediment and water quality testing has shown little to no impact as a result of Salmosan® treatments (More information can be found at www.atlanticfishfarmers.com)

Prior to full registration of Salmosan®, yearly applications for access to this product were submitted to PMRA. Full product registration of Salmosan® with PMRA occurred in September 2017.

2. Interlox Paramove®50 / AQUAPAROX 50

Hydrogen peroxide products are benign in the environment, degrading quickly to water and oxygen. Approval for use of Interlox Paramove®50 through an ER was received in June 2010 and the first application occurred that same month.

Like Salmosan®, new ER applications for use were submitted annually. Full product registration of Interlox Paramove®50 with PMRA occurred in March 2015. Another hydrogen peroxide product, Aquaparox 50 was registered in September 2016.

3. Avermectin

Avermectins such as SLICE® and Ivermectin may be used as an in-feed sea lice treatment, under a veterinary prescription. Both products are approved under VDD,³ though the use of Ivermectin is via Extra Label Drug Use decision.

CURRENT ALTERNATIVE SEA LICE TREATMENT OPTIONS

Non-therapeutant Control Strategies

³ <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ahc-asc/branch-dirigen/hpfb-dgpsa/vdd-dmv/index-eng.php>

Use of non-chemical management strategies for controlling on-farm sea lice such as cleaner fish, and/or hydro-licers, flushers and warm water systems, have been increasing each year. In 2022 most sea lice treatments were once again accomplished through mechanical removal. The use of these non-chemical control strategies does not necessarily remove the need for therapeutic options as many of these alternatives involve physical handling of the fish so less stressful options may be required at higher and lower water temperatures. There are currently six vessels available for operation in New Brunswick.

RESEARCH AND ALTERNATIVE SEA LICE MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

The ACFFA has played an active role on behalf of our industry working with researchers from government, academia, private institutions, and with industry at the regional, national and international level. Collaborative and coordinated research to support effective sea lice management has commonly focused on five key areas:

1. Regulatory Research

- To support the evaluation, licensing and use of new treatment options

2. Environmental Dynamics

- To provide necessary answers regarding potential risk to the marine environment and non-target species as a result of sea lice management activities

3. Management Practices

- To support improved on-farm sea lice management practices

4. Novel Treatments / Green Technology

- Evaluation of non- chemical management options in addition to new technology to reduce the potential environmental impact of sea lice management and improve sea lice management performance.

5. Modelling

- Collecting and using data to evaluate the effectiveness of sea lice management activities and/or to provide information on means of improving the effectiveness of new or current technologies.

Industry continues to make significant financial and human resource investments to support research critical to improving knowledge and understanding of sea lice dynamics and management.

The ACFFA regularly publishes proceedings from workshops at <http://www.atlanticfishfarmers.com/research-program-project-reports.html>. Results from all collaborative research is publicly shared through workshops, communication with stakeholder groups at a variety of meetings, as well as industry and agency websites. Interim research data from private and academic research is often available at these workshops and published as part of workshop proceedings.

Some examples that we can report from this research program include:

- ✓ The Fish-iTrends Decision Support System continues to provide an online data management system that records all sea lice population data; these data are verified by a third-party audit and are being used to evaluate the effectiveness of sea lice management;
- ✓ Well boats and tarpaulins were introduced to ensure all sea lice bath treatments are performed in closed systems, significantly reducing potential environmental impact and the quantity of products required for effective sea lice treatments;
- ✓ Hydrological surveys to determine possible refinements to the current Aquaculture Bay Management Areas;
- ✓ Implementation and adjustment of alternative lice removal technologies (e.g., warm water);
- ✓ Evaluation on the use of cunner and lump fish as a sea lice cleaner fish; and

- ✓ Evaluation of new sea lice treatment products and vaccines.

NON-TARGET SPECIES

Wild salmon populations in Atlantic Canada fluctuate in a similar manner in areas with and without salmon farms. Sea lice populations on salmon farms during the out-migration period are very low and pose little risk to wild smolt. There has been a range of field research and scientific monitoring conducted on all sea lice bath treatment products both in Canada and in other jurisdictions.

To view fishery data visit <http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/stats/commercial/sea-maritimes-eng.htm>

SEA LICE MANAGEMENT ON FARMED SALMON 2023

Salmon farming companies continue to prepare a coordinated sea lice management and treatment strategy that includes controlling lice numbers in each Bay Management Area, product rotations and synchronized treatments. This strategy is communicated to traditional fishing groups annually.

In 2023, Avermectins were used in-feed and treatments of Salmosan® were used in closed treatment systems. The majority of sea lice treatments in 2023 were completed with warm water, flusher and or hydro-licer equipped vessels.

As shown in Figure 3, warm water temperatures experienced during the winter of 2023 kept sea lice numbers higher than usual with Salmosan treatments starting as early as January.

In July 2023 the water temperatures increased above 10 degrees Celsius and the temperature held for an extended period, into late November, contributing to prolonged presence of sea lice populations through December 2023.

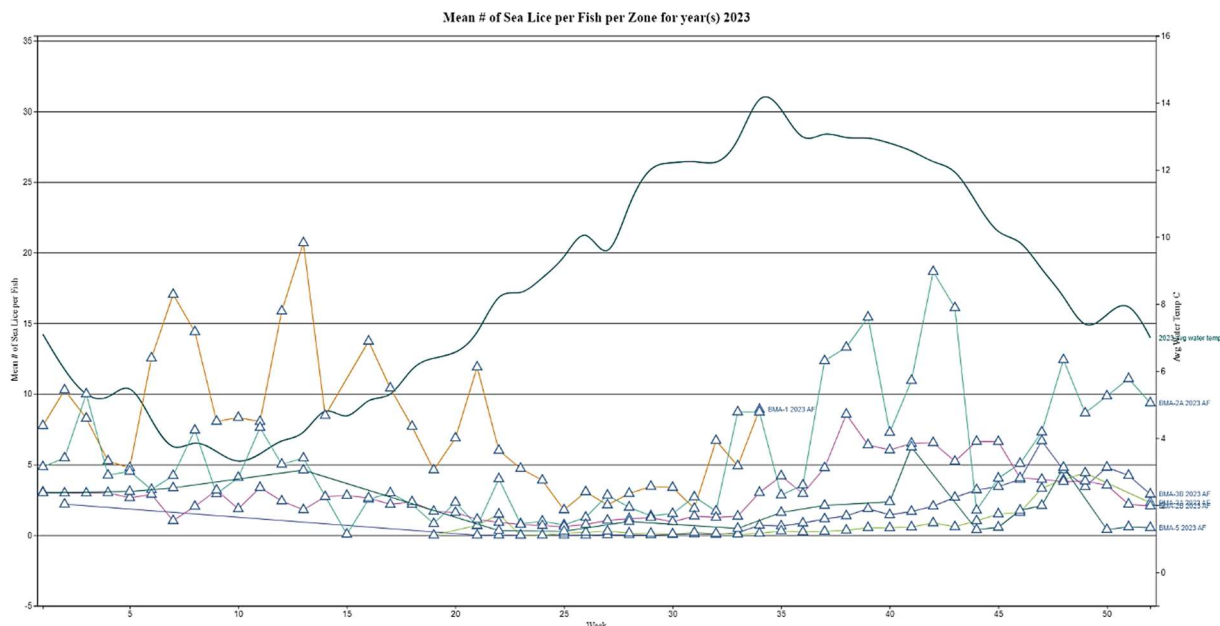


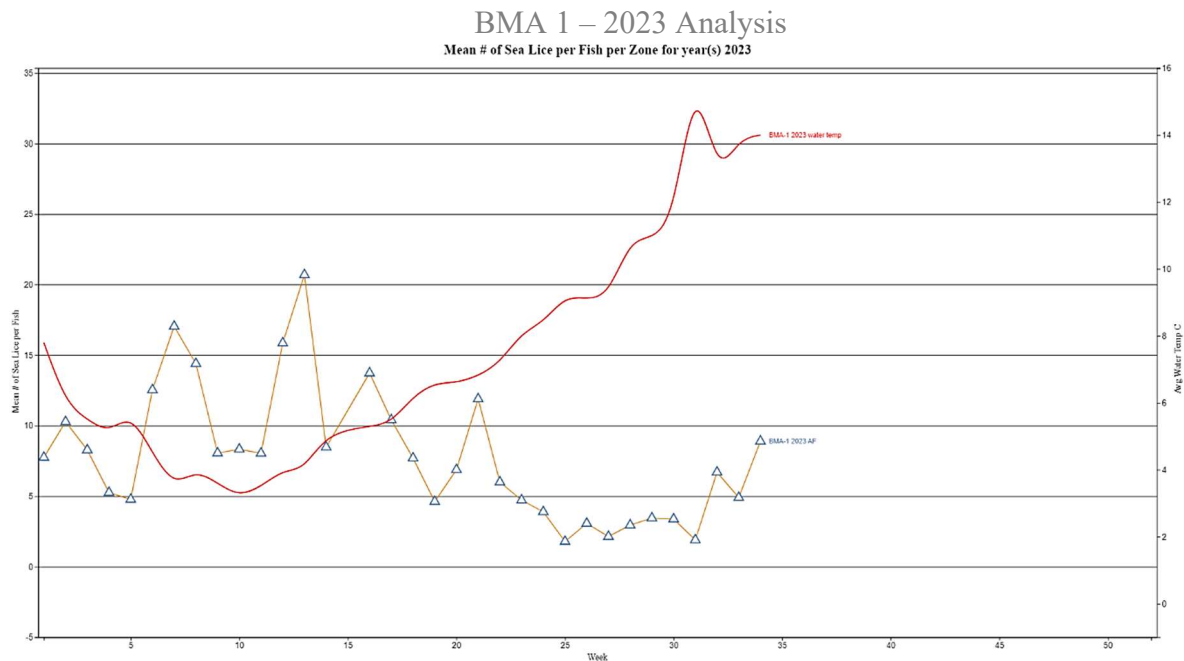
Figure 3: Average adult female *Lepeophtheirus salmonis* sea lice per BMA and average water temperature for 2023

2023 ANALYSIS BY BAY MANAGEMENT AREA

The following data charts are generated from the Fish-iTrends data base system developed in 2009 through collaboration with the Atlantic Veterinary College at the University of PEI. Fish-iTrends supports sea lice management for the Atlantic salmon farming industry.

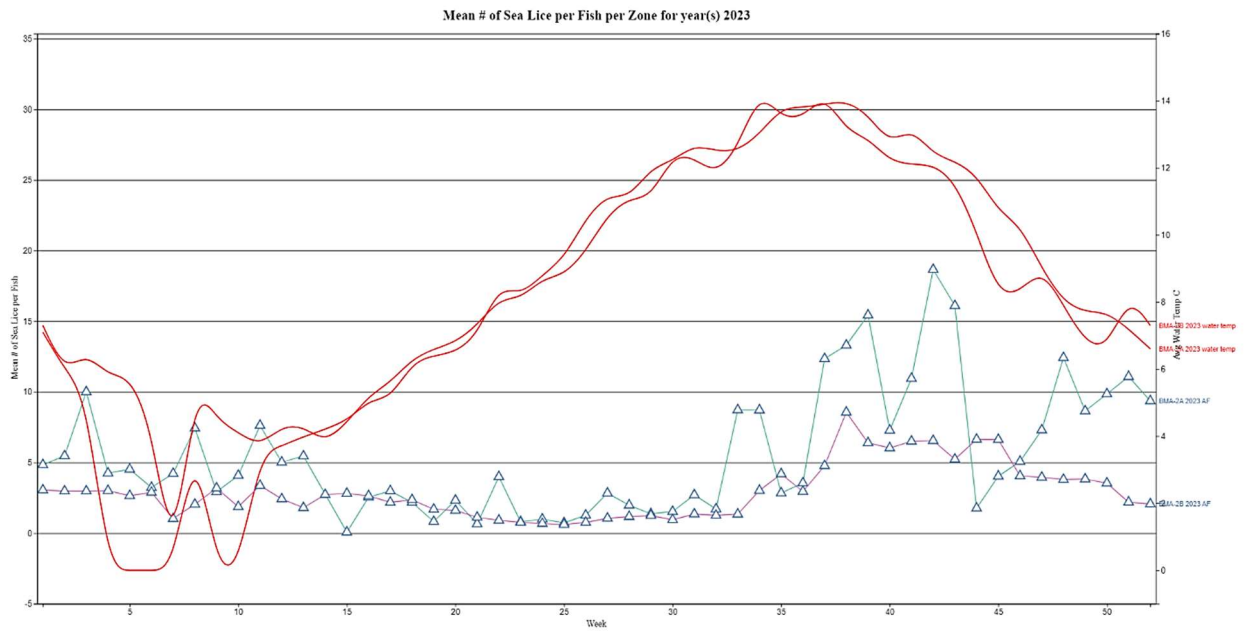
Charts for each Bay Management Area contain the average count, by month, for adult female *Lepeophtheirus salmonis* sea lice and the average water temperature. These lice are considered the most critical to the management of sea lice populations within a salmon farm. Information specific to the management area is provided below.

Note the Y-axis scale (numbers of lice) varies from one graph to another.



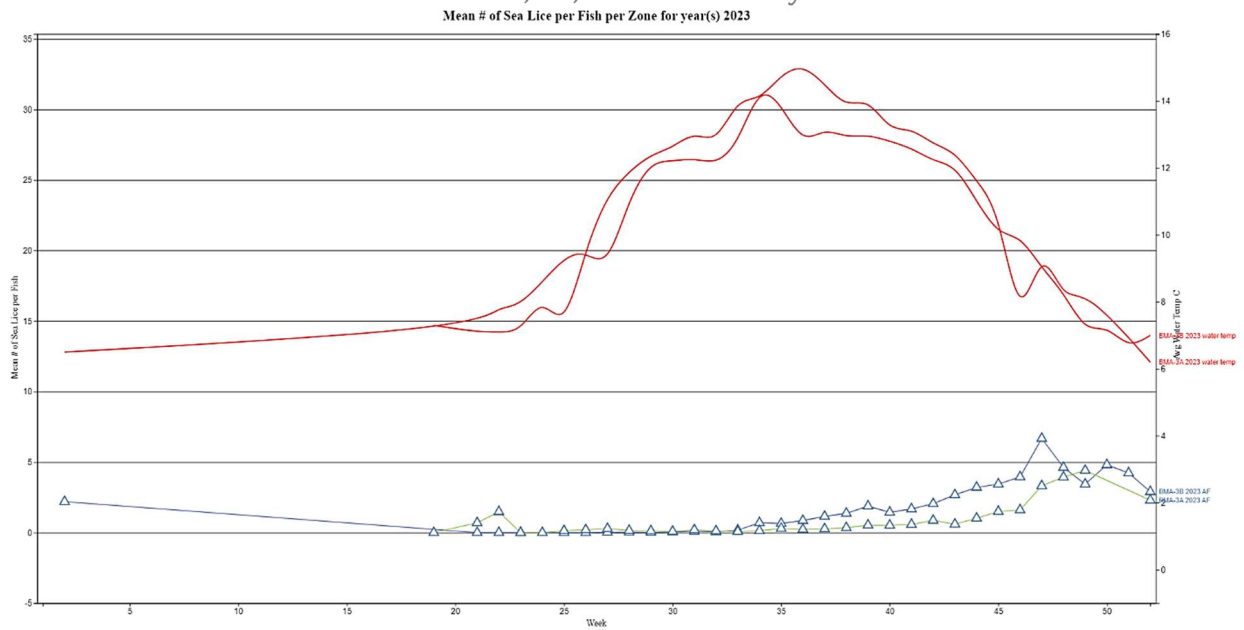
BMA 1 was being harvested in 2023. No in feed treatments took place. Salmosan treatments were used from January to April.

BMA 2a, 2b – 2023 Analysis



BMA 2a and 2b sites were stocked with smolt starting in April 2022. No in feed treatments were used. In BMA 2a Salmosan was used from January through December. In BMA 2b Salmosan was used from April to July.

BMA 3a, 3b, 3c – 2023 Analysis



BMA 3a, 3b and 3c were stocked in the spring of 2023. There were Salmosan treatments at 2 farms in November and December. In feed treatments were used from April to December.

2017- 2023 TREND ANALYSIS

The following graph provides data on the mean number of adult female sea lice in New Brunswick since 2017.

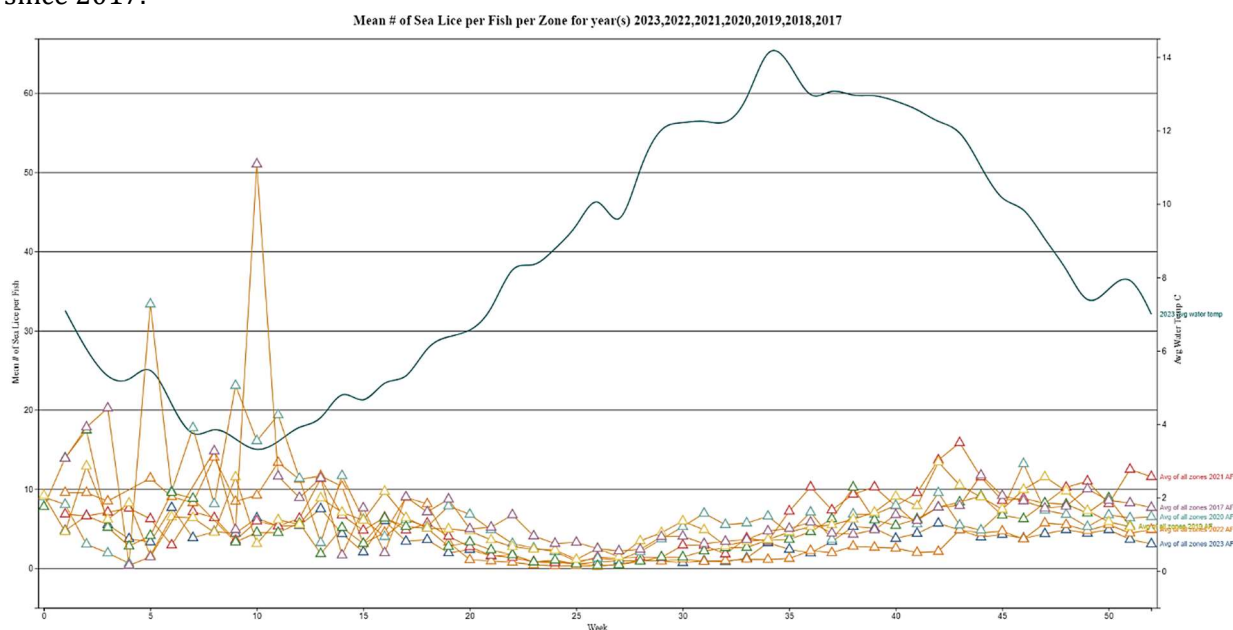


Figure 4: Average number of adult female *Lepeophtheirus salmonis* sea lice from 2017-2023

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report shows the industry has been effective overall in mitigating the impacts of sea lice populations even as uncontrollable climate change effects (e.g., prolonged warm waters), continue to make this challenging. There is a recognized ongoing need to access more proactive tools to ensure the industry can continue to have a minimal environmental footprint.

These tools can only be developed through continued research that supports the development of more non-chemical management options such as the use of cleaner fish, warm water showers and sea lice retention filters. Research and monitoring are also critical to the approvals of new sea lice medicines and vaccines.

Additionally, sea lice inhibitors in new feed formulations and vaccines offer great promise but require regulatory changes to access new feed ingredients. While the use of medicines and therapeutants is not necessarily the first or only option evaluated to treat for sea lice, access to a range of products available and approved for use in other countries that are exported to Canadian consumers, must also be supported domestically.

The access to a fuller suite of tools would alter the graphs and ensure fewer and smaller peaks in lice number by having access to a variety of products with less ecological impacts. Incorporated in an operational integrated pest management plan, this would increase production with fewer fish losses which would translate to increased socio-economic benefits in coastal communities through the Atlantic region.

Accessing new tools through support of new research and advocating that Health Canada designate appropriate resources to process applications in a timely and secure manner remain priorities for ACFFA.

APPENDIX A

Aquaculture Bay Management Areas of New Brunswick

