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# B.C. urged to ban open-net fish farms within 5 years

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The NDP-dominated legislature committee on sustainable aquaculture has recommended an end to salmon farming as it's now practised along the B.C. coast.

The committee's long-awaited report tabled on Wednesday calls for a "rapid phased transition" from the current open-pen fish farms to ocean-based closed containment systems to begin immediately.

The industry would be given three years to develop the new systems, and another two years to phase them in. That would mean an end to open-net fish farms within five years.

The report also recommends no salmon farming of any kind along the B.C. coast north of Vancouver Island.

The committee held public meetings up and down the coast over the past 18 months, hearing submissions from both sides of the debate.

Committee chair Robin Austin, the NDP MLA for the North Coast riding of Skeena, said he knows change is always difficult.

But he said he believes the industry, with the backing of the provincial government, can make the adjustment.

A Liberal member of the committee, Ron Cantelon, who represents the riding of Nanaimo-Parkville, dismissed that as a "fairy tale."

He said if the report were implemented, it would mean the end of the salmon farming industry in B.C.

Industry representatives who gathered in Victoria for the release of the report agree with Cantelon, saying the close containment technology is untried on this scale and they just can't make the transition within five years.

B.C. Agriculture and Fisheries Minister Pat Bell has said he would not feel bound by the committee's recommendations.

He also said this week that the government decided to appoint more NDP MLAs than Liberals to the committee as a test to see whether they were ready to govern responsibly.

The New Democrats had campaigned against open-net fish farms during the last election, calling for a moratorium on fish farm licences, and winning most of the coastal ridings that host fish farms.