

Humboldt County Rolls the Dice with Brand-new Nordic Chief

At a July 12 Humboldt County Board of Supervisors meeting, incoming Nordic Aquafarms CEO Brenda Chandler sought to reassure the board after the sudden and unexplained departure of previous Nordic CEO Erik Heim. "I'm still getting up to speed on all the aspects for California but I still have a great team behind me," Chandler said.

Well, if that's the case, then the team behind Nordic's CEO du jour must have changed substantially since late 2018 when Bent Urup, the world's foremost aquaculture designer, engineer, operator and entrepreneur told me in his Fredericia, Denmark office that the team Nordic had assembled for its then \$500 million Belfast, Maine project simply wasn't up to snuff.

Chandler further told the Board of Supervisors Nordic has "worked on some very large projects on the East Coast," but this is simply false. Nordic has "worked" only one east-coast project - that of my hometown of Belfast, Maine - and 'in five years of pursuing that project, that "work" has included not one day of actual construction. Putting it kindly, that miserable track record is enough to discourage any would-be investor, especially in an industry that is suffering low prices for its salmon product and considerable pandemic-era salmon price fluctuation.

Chandler also said Nordic has an east-coast "employee on the ground." Are we to be reassured by Nordic having one employee on the ground for a project of a pre-pandemic \$500 million? This is the managerial equivalent of hiring a security to watch the place - day shift only.

Meanwhile, the Humboldt County Planning Commission will hold a July 28 meeting on Nordic's permit application. According to the Mad River Union, Planning Director John Ford said the main issues to be addressed will include carbon emissions, truck traffic, and preventing fish escape.

Having covered Nordic in Maine for more than four years, I hope your planning commission isn't relying on Nordic information in its deliberations, as Nordic has, here in Maine, misled and outright lied about these issues and others.

Nordic's stated carbon emissions for Maine don't include having to dig up and truck off thousands of truckloads of earth to stabilize its construction site. This after declaring the site "perfect." And shockingly, this mirrors the same exact problem Nordic has had in its hometown of Fredrikstad, Norway, where its failure to properly assess its construction site caused its building to sink into the ground, likely causing structural damage to the buildings, likely causing Nordic to significantly reduce production levels, and even causing the company to at one point announce it would convert the operation into a research facility...only to later abandon that short-lived idea.

Needless to say, this incompetence, identically repeated in Belfast, would dramatically affect Nordic's rosy declarations of just a few nice little electric trucks a day in Belfast.

Nor do Nordic's rosy carbon protestations include transporting large amounts of fishmeal ingredients from far-flung corners of the world, or the killing of topsoil - a major carbon mitigator - by the use of pesticides to grow soy and possibly other grains for aquaculture's grossly inefficient food-production model.

Then there are fish escapes, for which one look no further than the false February 2019 testimony given by Nordic's Marianne Naess to the Maine legislature's Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, in which Naess said fish can't escape from land-based industrial fish farms. Naess's testimony completely contradicted various press accounts of just such escapes from land-based industrial fish farms in Norway and New Brunswick - to name the ones we know of. Even more shocking, Naess's testimony contradicts previous statements made by Nordic itself, in public meetings and on its website.

And on and on. As if evidence of Nordic's unreliability - and fundamental incompetence - were somehow sorely lacking.

I wish the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors and Planning Commissions all the best with their Nordic deliberations, but if they're looking to Nordic Aquafarms for reliable data, the historical record very much suggests they are looking in the wrong place.