



August 29, 2018

INNOVATIVE SOLUTION TO OYSTER NOROVIRUS OUTBREAKS IN DEVELOPMENT

Project partners develop a faster, more cost-effective test aimed at identifying Norovirus in oysters before they get to consumers

COURTENAY – Outbreaks in Norovirus linked to BC oysters has presented a challenge to the coastal shellfish sector in recent years. An innovative project supported by the Island Coastal Economic Trust will help shellfish harvesters detect and mitigate the pathogen at the earliest stages, protecting consumers and the value of BC’s shellfish industry.

“This new methodology is not intended to be a replacement for CFIA tests and designations about food safety,” explained Dr. Jim Powell, BC Centre for Aquatic Health Sciences CEO. “The tool we’re developing is a faster and more cost-effective option for producers to identify problems and to mitigate production and supply losses. It’s important for us to take concrete measures to protect consumers.”

The project, proposed by the BC Centre for Aquatic Health Sciences, involves the development of a molecular assay service and bio-surveillance program for Norovirus detection. Other key partners in the project include the BC Ministry of Agriculture, North Island College, and the BC Shellfish Growers Association.

This molecular method will allow early detection of the virus at the farm level before it becomes widespread, informing farmers, producers and regulators of any potential threats. It will also help identify the source of the Norovirus and allow for future mitigation strategies to deal with identified threats to production.

“Norovirus outbreaks have immediate health impacts, but also concerning is the financial impact and longer-term damage to the reputation of the industry,” said Josie Osborne, ICET Chair. “This project will allow producers to identify potential problems before they get to consumers, and that means greater confidence in the high-quality products coming from our waters.”

ICET has a long track record of supporting aquaculture and fisheries innovation as demonstrated through projects such as the Deep Bay Field Station, VIU Centre for Sturgeon Studies and ThisFish Seafood traceability platform.

Funding for this project was provided through the Innovation Support funding stream of the Economic Infrastructure and Innovation Program. This new funding stream is designed to drive and support growth of the technology sector and tech related projects across sectors, to increase innovation, productivity and competitiveness in key sectors as well as to support projects which pioneer “new ways of doing things” such as the Norovirus Detection Tool project. Up to \$100,000 is available for qualifying projects, and more detailed information can be found at: islandcoastaltrust.ca/economic-infrastructure-program.

About the Island Coastal Economic Trust

Created and capitalized by the Province of BC, the Island Coastal Economic Trust has been at the forefront of economic diversification, planning and regional revitalization for the past eleven years.

ICET is independently governed by a Board of Directors and two Regional Advisory Committees which include more than 50 locally elected officials, MLAs and appointees from the Island and Coast. This exceptional team of leaders collaborate to set regional priorities and build vital multi-regional networks.

Through a community centered decision-making process, more than \$50 million in funding has been approved for over 180 economic infrastructure and economic development readiness projects. These investments have leveraged over \$270 million in new investment into the region creating more than 2500 construction phase jobs and 2600 long term permanent jobs.

A full overview of ICET can be found at www.islandcoastaltrust.ca.

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