

'Arrogant' sponsor accused of kicking teen out of soccer team facing consumer backlash

Posted by Joan Russow

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Freyja Reed with her grandparents

A multinational aquaculture corporation is facing a consumer backlash after being accused of forcing a soccer club it sponsors in northern Vancouver Island to kick a 14-year-old girl and telling her to find different sport after she refused to stop criticizing the practice of salmon farming .

The Upper Island Riptide club announced Thursday that it has “parted ways” with goalkeeper Freyja Reed after the teen from Comox, BC refused to stop criticizing the activities of the club’s sponsor Marine Harvest, the largest open-net fish farm operator in the province.

The Norwegian-owned corporation expressed ‘disappointment’ that one out of the thousands players sponsored by the company was creating a fuss, but added that there was a way for Freyja and her mother Anissa Reed to avoid being muzzled.

“You can find another program to play in or choose to do a different sport,” Marine Harvest spokesman Ian Roberts told CBC.

But the company is now struggling to repair the brand’s reputation after Canadians outraged by the corporation’s heavy-handed actions have left a string of negative comments and low ratings on the Marine Harvest Facebook page.

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"I do not eat farmed salmon. Silencing a 14 year old who just wants to play soccer is just wrong," Suzanne Bolwell wrote. "If you people want to sponsor community activities it should not come with strings attached."

"Way to trample on the hopes and dreams of children," Ryan Bee wrote. "Your crass censorship only proves that your products and production methods are as bad for the environment as critics say."

"Bullying a 14 year old girl huh?" Lu Bassett wrote. "You need to offer her an unequivocal apology, or go bankrupt. I prefer the latter, because I don't think you have the moral integrity to do the former."

"Marine Harvest's donations to community groups have not, and will not, and will never, restrict a recipient's right to voice their opinions or their ability to speak freely," Marine Harvest stated in a press release. "Our goal in providing support to groups like the Upper Island Riptide has always been for the children in our community to have a positive environment to play and learn."

The Marine Harvest's PR strategy has done little to diffuse consumers' anger towards the company.

"When a corporation forces a soccer club to choose between freedom of expression and the money a corporation donates in order to further their own agenda," Chris Williams wrote. "It makes many consumers choose sides."

"What you have just done is disenfranchised a large group of people," Williams added. "Now while you may deem this an acceptable loss. You will surely misstep again. Especially since your Public Relations is clearly not very effective."

While the incident is turning out to be a disaster in public relations for Marine Harvest, there

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may be happy ending for Freyja, with local fisherman coming to the rescue of the teen.

The United Fishermen, Allied Workers Union, and many individual fishermen are setting up a trust fund so Freyja could continue playing soccer without being beholden to sponsors.

"Thanks for standing up for your beliefs," Brian Wadhams of Vancouver, BC wrote on a Facebook page setup to support the teen. "I also am a fisher, and understand the issues with fish farms, and totally opposed to open net fish farms. Keep up the good work, never let funding get in the way of what you believe in."