

Characterization of the effluent from an intensive marine recirculating system for the culture of finfish, and studies on effluent based culture of microalgae

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## Table of Contents

|  |      |
|--|------|
| Abstract .....   | v    |
| Acknowledgements .....   | vii  |
| Dedication .....   | viii |
| List of Tables .....   | ix   |
| List of Figures.....   | x    |
| BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE.....                                      | 1    |
| Environmental effects of Aquaculture.....                          | 1    |
| Recirculating aquaculture systems.....                             | 2    |
| Characterization of Aquaculture Effluent Wastes.....               | 3    |
| Biological Treatment Alternatives.....                             | 6    |
| HYPOTHESES.....  | 8    |
| The specific objectives of this study.....                         | 8    |
| The specific hypotheses to be tested are as follows.....           | 10   |
| MATERIALS AND METHODS.....   | 11   |
| Experimental recirculating grow out system for marine finfish..... | 11   |
| Waste Characterization.....  | 13   |
| Laboratory-scale effluent-based microalgae culture.....            | 14   |
| Pilot-scale effluent-based microalgae culture.....                 | 15   |
| RESULTS.....   | 16   |
| Waste characterization.....  | 16   |
| Laboratory-scale effluent-based microalgae culture (Trial 1).....  | 17   |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Laboratory-scale effluent-based microalgae culture (Trial 2)..... | 20 |
| Laboratory-scale effluent-based wild plankton culture.....        | 24 |
| Pilot-scale effluent-based <i>I. galbana</i> culture.....         | 26 |
| Pilot-scale effluent based wild plankton culture.....             | 27 |
| DISCUSSION.....   | 27 |
| RAS waste characterization.....                                   | 27 |
| Laboratory-scale effluent-based microalgae culture (Trial 1)..... | 29 |
| Laboratory-scale effluent-based microalgae culture (Trial 2)..... | 31 |
| Laboratory-scale effluent-based wild plankton culture.....        | 34 |
| Pilot-scale effluent-based <i>I. galbana</i> culture.....         | 36 |
| Pilot-scale effluent based wild plankton culture.....             | 37 |
| CONCLUSION.....   | 38 |

## Abstract

Intensive recirculating aquaculture systems (RAS) routinely discharge effluent that, while relatively small in volume, is particularly enriched in nutrients. The objectives of this study were two-fold; to characterize the wastes produced by an intensive marine RAS for southern flounder, and to evaluate the effluent as a nutritive base for marine algal production.

Effluent from UNCW's pilot scale RAS, containing a population of southern flounder (*Paralichthys lethostigma*) was collected monthly for a period of one year and analyzed for total phosphorous, total nitrogen, phosphate, ammonia, nitrate/nitrite, solids and biological oxygen demand. The results of this characterization revealed an effluent high in dissolved phosphorous and dissolved nitrogen concentrations.

Secondary to this characterization, studies were performed to determine if this effluent would support the growth of microalgae, and if this microalgae growth would reduce the nutrient concentrations within the effluent. Laboratory-scale experiments were performed utilizing this effluent as a nutrient base for the production of *Isochrysis galbana* and indigenous plankton from the coastal waters of southeastern North Carolina. Four different nutrient media were used to compare the marine RAS effluent in 50 and 100% strengths to a commercial media (Guillard's f/2) and a nutrient free seawater control. These cultures were monitored for algal growth as well as reduction in nutrient concentrations over time. The effluent proved to be a better nutrient source for the production of *I. galbana* and indigenous plankton than the commercially available media producing higher cell densities and a marked reduction of dissolved nutrients with phytoplankton growth. In addition to these laboratory studies, trials were performed in 1200-L outdoor bioreactors utilizing effluent from the marine RAS for the production of *I. galbana* and

indigenous plankton. Algal growth and nutrient concentrations were measured over time and an increase in algal densities with a concurrent reduction of nutrients was observed.

These studies confirmed that the effluent from a marine recirculating aquaculture system for the production of southern flounder provides an excellent nutrient source for the production of the microalgae *I. galbana* as well as indigenous plankton, and that microalgae was an effective means of reducing the inorganic nutrient loads associated with these fish rearing systems.

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### Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my wife, Mariska, and to my children; Morgen, Aidyn, Christopher and Shane.

## Lists of Tables

| Table  | Page |
|--|------|
| 1. Parameters analyzed in three separate studies for freshwater RAS..... | 41   |

|    |   |    |
|----|---|----|
| 2. | Composition of two types of commercially available media (Hoff and Snell 1987). With the exception of B12 and Biotin all units are in mg/L..... | 42 |
|----|---|----|

### List of Figures

| Figure |  | Page |
|--------|--|------|
| 1.     | Plan view of an intensive RAS for the culture of finfish located at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington's Center for Marine |      |

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Science.....   | 43 |
| 2. Collection sump (1800 L) located in relation to a marine finfish RAS at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington’s Center for Marine Science.....   | 44 |
| 3. Pilot scale bioreactors.....  | 45 |
| 4. Average monthly volume (L) of effluent collected during the 24 hr collection periods. Plotted points represent mean $\pm$ se ( $N = 3$ ). Standard errors not shown are within the area of the plotted point.....   | 46 |
| 5. Average monthly concentrations (mg/L) of phosphate ( $\text{PO}_4$ ), nitrate/nitrite ( $\text{NO}_3/\text{NO}_2$ ) and ammonia ( $\text{NH}_4$ ) collected during the 24 h collection period. Plotted points represent mean $\pm$ se ( $N = 3$ ). Standard errors not shown are within the area of the plotted point.....  | 47 |
| 6. Average monthly concentrations (mg/L) of total phosphorous (TP) and total Nitrogen (TN) collected during the 24 h collection period. Plotted points represent mean $\pm$ se ( $N = 3$ ).....  | 48 |
| 7. Average monthly solids and $\text{BOD}_5$ concentrations (mg/L) collected during the 24 h collection period. Plotted points represent mean $\pm$ se ( $N = 3$ ).....  | 49 |
| 8. <i>I. galbana</i> cell growth in 2-L flasks under different nutrient treatments (Trial 1): seawater (control), Guillard’s f/2 (f/2), 50% effluent (50-Efl.) and 100% effluent (100-Efl.). Plotted points represent mean $\pm$ se ( $N = 3$ ). Standard errors not shown are within the area of the plotted point. Means not sharing the same letter are significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) different (Tukey-Kramer HSD).....                                      | 50 |
| 9. Final (d15) <i>I. galbana</i> cell densities in 2-L flasks under different nutrient treatments: seawater (control), Guillard’s f/2 (f/2), 50% effluent (50-Efl.) and 100% effluent (100-Efl.)(Trial 1).....   | 51 |
| 10. Phosphate concentrations associated with <i>I. galbana</i> growth in 2-L flasks under different nutrient treatments (Trial 1): seawater (control), Guillard’s f/2 (f/2), 50% effluent (50-Efl.) and 100% effluent (100-Efl.). Plotted points represent mean $\pm$ se ( $N = 3$ ). Standard errors not shown are within the area of the plotted point. Means not sharing the same letter are significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) different (Tukey-Kramer HSD)..... | 52 |
| 11. Nitrate/nitrite concentrations associated with <i>I. galbana</i> growth in 2-L flasks under different nutrient treatments (Trial 1): seawater (control), Guillard’s f/2 (f/2), 50% effluent (50-Efl.) and 100% effluent (100-Efl.). Plotted points represent mean $\pm$ se ( $N = 3$ ). Standard errors not shown are within the area of the plotted point. Means not sharing the same letter are significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) different                   |    |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| (Tukey-Kramer HSD).....   | 53 |
| 12. Ammonia concentrations associated with <i>I. galbana</i> growth in 2-L flasks under different nutrient treatments (Trial 1): seawater (control), Guillard's f/2 (f/2), 50% effluent (50-Efl.) and 100% effluent (100-Efl.). Plotted points represent mean $\pm$ se ( $N = 3$ ). Standard errors not shown are within the area of the plotted point. Means not sharing the same letter are significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) different (Tukey-Kramer HSD).....          | 54 |
| 13. Total phosphorous concentrations associated with <i>I. galbana</i> growth in 2-L flasks under different nutrient treatments (Trial 1): seawater (control), Guillard's f/2 (f/2) 50% effluent (50-Efl.) and 100% effluent (100-Efl.). Plotted points represent mean $\pm$ se ( $N = 3$ ). Standard errors not shown are within the area of the plotted point. Means not sharing the same letter are significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) different (Tukey-Kramer HSD)..... | 55 |
| 14. Total nitrogen concentrations associated with <i>I. galbana</i> growth in 2-L flasks under different nutrient treatments (Trial 1): seawater (control), Guillard's f/2 (f/2), 50% effluent (50-Efl.) and 100% effluent (100-Efl.). Plotted points represent mean $\pm$ se ( $N = 3$ ). Standard errors not shown are within the area of the plotted point. Means not sharing the same letter are significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) different (Tukey-Kramer HSD).....   | 56 |
| 15. <i>I. galbana</i> cell growth in 2-L flasks under different nutrient treatments (Trial 2): seawater (control), Guillard's f (f), 50% effluent (50-Efl.) and 100% effluent (100-Efl.). Plotted points represent mean $\pm$ se ( $N = 3$ ). Standard errors not shown are within the area of the plotted point. Means not sharing the same letter are significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) different (Tukey-Kramer HSD).....  | 57 |
| 16. Final (d15) <i>I. galbana</i> cell densities in 2-L flasks under different nutrient treatments: seawater (control), Guillard's f (f), 50% effluent (50-Efl.) and 100% effluent (100-Efl.)(Trial 2).....   | 58 |
| 17. Phosphate concentrations associated with <i>I. galbana</i> growth in 2-L flasks under different nutrient treatments (Trial 2): seawater (control), Guillard's f (f), 50% effluent (50-Efl.) and 100% effluent (100-Efl.). Plotted points represent mean $\pm$ se ( $N = 3$ ). Standard errors not shown are within the area of the plotted point. Means not sharing the same letter are significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) different (Tukey-Kramer HSD).....            | 59 |
| 18. Nitrate/nitrite concentrations associated with <i>I. galbana</i> growth in 2-L flasks under different nutrient treatments (Trial 2): seawater (control), Guillard's f (f), 50% effluent (50-Efl.) and 100% effluent (100-Efl.). Plotted points represent mean $\pm$ se ( $N = 3$ ). Standard errors not shown are within the area of the plotted point. Means not sharing the same letter are significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) different (Tukey-Kramer HSD).....      | 60 |

19. Ammonia concentrations associated with *I. galbana* growth in 2-L flasks under different nutrient treatments (Trial 2): seawater (control), Guillard's f (f), 50% effluent (50-Efl.) and 100% effluent (100-Efl.). Plotted points represent mean  $\pm$  se ( $N = 3$ ). Standard errors not shown are within the area of the plotted point. Means not sharing the same letter are significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) different (Tukey-KramerHSD).....61
20. Total phosphorous concentrations associated with *I. galbana* growth in 2-L flasks under different nutrient treatments (Trial 2): seawater (control), Guillard's f (f), 50% effluent (50-Efl.) and 100% effluent (100-Efl.). Plotted points represent mean  $\pm$  se ( $N = 3$ ). Standard errors not shown are within the area of the plotted point. Means not sharing the same letter are significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) different (Tukey-Kramer HSD).....62
21. Total nitrogen concentrations associated with *I. galbana* growth in 2-L flasks under different nutrient treatments (Trial 2): seawater (control), Guillard's f (f), 50% effluent (50-Efl.) and 100% effluent (100-Efl.). Plotted points represent mean  $\pm$  se ( $N = 3$ ). Standard errors not shown are within the area of the plotted point. Means not sharing the same letter are significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) different (Tukey-Kramer HSD).....63
22. Wild plankton cell growth in 2-L flasks under different nutrient treatments: seawater (control), Guillard's f/2 (f/2), 50% effluent (50-Efl.) and 100% effluent (100-Efl.). Plotted points represent mean  $\pm$  se ( $N = 3$ ). Standard errors not shown are within the area of the plotted point. Means not sharing the same letter are significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) different (Tukey-Kramer HSD).....64
23. Wild plankton final (d5) cell densities in 2-L flasks under different nutrient treatments: seawater (control), Guillard's f (f), 50% effluent (50-Efl.) and 100% effluent(100-Efl.).....65
24. Phosphate concentrations associated with wild plankton growth in 2-L flasks under different nutrient treatments: seawater (control), Guillard's f/2 (f/2), 50% effluent (50-Efl.) and 100% effluent (100-Efl.). Plotted points represent mean  $\pm$  se ( $N = 3$ ). Standard errors not shown are within the area of the plotted point. Means not sharing the same letter are significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) different (Tukey-Kramer HSD).....66
25. Nitrate/nitrite concentrations associated with wild plankton growth in 2-L flasks under different nutrient treatments: seawater (control), Guillard's f/2 (f/2), 50% effluent (50-Efl.) and 100% effluent (100-Efl.). Plotted points represent mean  $\pm$  se ( $N = 3$ ). Standard errors not shown are within the area of the plotted point. Means not sharing the same letter are significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) different (Tukey-Kramer HSD).....67

26. Ammonia concentrations associated with wild plankton growth in 2-L flasks under different nutrient treatments: seawater (control), Guillard's f/2 (f/2), 50% effluent (50-Efl.) and 100% effluent (100-Efl.). Plotted points represent mean  $\pm$  se ( $N = 3$ ). Standard errors not shown are within the area of the plotted point. Means not sharing the same letter are significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) different (Tukey-Kramer HSD).....68
27. Total phosphorous concentrations associated with wild plankton growth in 2-L flasks under different nutrient treatments: seawater (control), Guillard's f/2 (f/2), 50% effluent (50-Efl.) and 100% effluent (100-Efl.). Plotted points represent mean  $\pm$  se ( $N = 3$ ). Standard errors not shown are within the area of the plotted point. Means not sharing the same letter are significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) different (Tukey-Kramer HSD).....69
28. Total nitrogen concentrations associated with wild plankton growth in 2-L flasks under different nutrient treatments: seawater (control), Guillard's f/2 (f/2), 50% effluent (50-Efl.) and 100% effluent (100-Efl.). Plotted points represent mean  $\pm$  se ( $N = 3$ ). Standard errors not shown are within the area of the plotted point. Means not sharing the same letter are significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) different (Tukey-Kramer HSD).....70
29. *I. galbana* cell growth in 1200-L bioreactors containing 100% effluent (100-Efl.). Plotted points represent mean  $\pm$  se ( $N = 3$ ). There was no significant ( $P < 0.05$ ) Difference in growth throughout the culture trial.....71
30. Nutrient concentrations associated with *I. galbana* growth in 1200-L bioreactors. Plotted points represent mean  $\pm$  se ( $N = 3$ ). Standard errors not shown are within the area of the plotted point. Means not sharing the same letter are significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) different (Tukey-Kramer HSD). Nutrient concentrations were significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) lower than initial (d0) from d10 onward ( $PO^4$ ) and from d4 onward ( $NO^3/NO^2$ ).....72
31. Nutrient concentrations associated with *I. galbana* growth in 1200-L bioreactors. Plotted points represent mean  $\pm$  se ( $N = 3$ ). Standard errors not shown are within the area of the plotted point. Means not sharing the same letter are significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) different (Tukey-Kramer HSD). There was no significant ( $P < 0.05$ ) difference in concentration (TP,TN) throughout the culture trial.....73
32. Wild plankton growth in 1200-L bioreactors. Plotted points represent mean  $\pm$  se ( $N = 3$ ).....74
33. Nutrient concentrations associated with wild plankton growth in 1200-L bioreactors. Plotted points represent mean  $\pm$  se ( $N = 3$ ). Standard errors not shown are within the area of the plotted point. Means not sharing the same letter are significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) different (Tukey-Kramer HSD). There was a general

trend of decline in nutrient concentration ( $\text{PO}_4$ ,  $\text{NH}_4$ ) and increase ( $\text{NO}_3/\text{NO}_2$ ).....75

34. Nutrient concentrations associated with wild plankton growth in 1200-L bioreactors. Plotted points represent mean  $\pm$  se ( $N = 3$ ). Standard errors not shown are within the area of the plotted point. Means not sharing the same letter are significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) different (Tukey-Kramer HSD). Total nitrogen was significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) lower than initial (d0) from d4 onward.....76

