



9th May 2018

Sir Edward Mountain MSP
Convenor
Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee

Dear Convenor

Sea lice on Scottish salmon farms

In its written and oral evidence to your Committee, various witnesses, including the Cabinet Secretary, have suggested that the sea lice problems are improving on Scottish farms.

For example, in their written evidence, Marine Harvest (Scotland) Limited said: “The range of treatment methods we now use resulted in our lice levels being six times lower at the end of 2017 than at the end of 2016”.

and

“We have introduced a range of measures ...All of these measures are helping to significantly reduce sea lice numbers and we are confident that will continue”.

In the Committee’s oral evidence sessions, Scott Landsburgh for the SSPO said “We have had a tough time in the past three or four years, but we are coming out of that, as you will see in the data that is published in the coming months” and Ben Hadfield, for Marine Harvest said: “...especially between 2013 and 2015, there was a higher burden of sea lice on some farms....”

In this vein, Salmon and Trout Conservation Scotland would like to draw the Committee’s attention to the Marine Harvest Group’s 1st Quarter Report 2018, just published at <http://hugin.info/209/R/2191367/848340.pdf>, which suggests a different picture:

At page 9 of that Report, addressing the costs of production at their Scottish farms: “Although reduced from the fourth quarter of 2017, the cost level per kg harvested increased in the first quarter of 2018 compared to the first quarter of 2017. This was due to mortality, negative scale effects from lower volumes and harvesting from lower performing sites than in the comparable quarter. Biological costs per kg

increased by 43% in the first quarter of 2018 compared to the corresponding quarter of 2017, mainly due to increased health costs, mortality and negative scale effects. Incident based mortality of EUR 1.0 million (EUR 0.7 million) was recognized due to anaemia and fish damaged in a storm.

Sea lice levels at the end of the quarter were higher than at the end of the comparable quarter of 2017.

Production in the first quarter has been adversely impacted by low seawater temperatures and storms. The biological performance has been challenging for our Scottish operations during the last quarters on low volumes and lower performing sites. This situation is not expected to improve significantly in the next quarter. Accordingly, costs are expected to remain high also in the second quarter of 2018”.

At page 15:

“**Except for Chile and Scotland**, all entities reported lower sea lice levels at the end of the first quarter of 2018 compared to the end of the first quarter of 2017”.

This appears to suggest, as has happened in the past, that sea lice levels fluctuate from year to year, but are, in 2018, again increasing.

Marine Harvest is the largest salmon farming company in Scotland and it is fair to assume that their experiences with sea lice and disease are mirrored across the sector.

We hope this assists the Committee.

Yours sincerely

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For Salmon and Trout Conservation Scotland