

RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

SALMON FARMING IN SCOTLAND

SUBMISSION FROM ARNOT JOHN MCWHINNIE

I am aged 75 and a retired journalist who was awarded the accolade of being Journalist of the Year in both the British and Scottish Press Awards. In addition to my normal journalistic duties of reporting crime, courts, home and legal affairs, I was the author for nearly 30 years of the weekly Angling Page in the Daily Record under the name Silver Wilkie. My passion since I was 10 years old has been angling, and I have fished for salmon, sea trout and brown trout all over Scotland.

When the first salmon farms began operating I, along with other anglers, believed they would help to save our stocks of wild salmon by making salmon cheaper to the public, by making it less economical for commercial netmen and poachers. Over the years, with the massive, virtually uncontrolled proliferation of salmon farms along the entire length of the West Coast of Scotland, we were proved wrong. For a long time now, particularly over the last 10 years, I have campaigned against salmon farms, off shore and in estuaries. It quickly became apparent that they were causing major harm to salmon and sea trout stocks on the West Coast by spewing out millions of sea lice and harmful chemicals. Smolts migrating from their natal rivers are literally being eaten alive as they swim up the coast through what I have described as a “sea lice soup”. A map of West Coast rivers where salmon and sea trout are officially endangered has been produced by the Scottish Government’s own Marine Scotland scientists. It is no coincidence that either close to, or at the mouth of, every river where migratory fish stocks are at a critically low level, there is a fish farm. It is also no coincidence that stocks in two of our major rivers on the North Coast, the Thurso and the Naver, are still abundant, and that is because their smolts have salmon farm free access at the beginning of their migration to the North Atlantic. It is not just the sea lice explosion which causes concern, but the real fear that diseases afflicting farmed salmon could spread to our native salmon and sea trout. Such diseases have ravaged fish farms resulting in countless hundreds of thousands of salmon dying and having to be taken away in secret for disposal down south. For years now there have been instances of thousands of farm salmon escaping damaged nets to possibly infect native species. There is also evidence that mounds of salmon faeces, decaying fish pellets and chemicals under every cage could spread disease. Crustaceans are also affected with areas under cages being sterile. There are genuine worries too that farmed salmon escapees could interact with wild salmon to destroy genetic integrity.

For all these reasons I would urge the Scottish Government to begin a process of legislation to prohibit the proliferation of fish farms, phase them out, and eventually force these mainly Norwegian owned fish farms to replace them with closed containment facilities, preferably on land and not at sea.

Arnot J. McWhinnie
April 2018.