

RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

SALMON FARMING IN SCOTLAND

SUBMISSION FROM INNES WEIR, STEINSVIK UK

1. and 2. Do you have any general views on the current state of the farmed salmon industry in Scotland? There have been several recent reports which suggest how the farmed salmon industry might be developed. Do you have any views on action that might be taken to help the sector grow in the future?

The farmed Salmon industry in Scotland is continually challenged, not just due to the demanding conditions and areas in which they farm, but also from the continuous de-marketing campaigns that beset them at every turn and detract from the very real progress the industry has made over its short life.

The industry is constantly adapting and evolving in the face of these challenges – environmental and political, using sustainable technological solutions, improvements in husbandry practices, more stringent internal and external imposed monitoring, whilst achieving a greater understanding of the environmental footprint that they leave and affect.

The sector itself fully understands the public and political concerns to its vital growth, and it is vital – food and specifically protein production must increase if we are to feed an ever-increasing population. Scottish farmed salmon is recognised world-wide as the gold standard, and its continued development must safeguard this status.

Solutions to this growth should be jointly developed in an open dialogue between industry, science and government – with fair representation from communities, stakeholders and partners alike.

The industry understands that getting expansion wrong will see them feel the effects long before anyone else.

3. The farmed salmon industry is currently managing a range of fish health and environmental challenges. Do you have any views on how these might be addressed?

Many of these issues are being addressed right now. It's a challenging time for the industry, but they need assistance from policy makers and regulators to ensure they can implement some of the strategies that will help them meet and surpass these present environmental issues.

Many of these challenges are being borne financially by the industry. Other farming industries have received grant aid or assistance when undergoing challenging events – should this not be offered to the salmon industry to help speed their ability to affect change and development? I think yes.

For example, the industry has in the last decade moved from chemical-based treatments against sea lice to biological control (wrasse and lumpfish – now being farmed on large scale in the UK) to mechanical control (warm water and water pressure), improving the environmental footprint and reducing the reliance on chemical intervention by over 90%.

New farming sites are able to be more off-shore, in deeper more energetic water – away from those coastal stream and rivers and the inshore migratory routes for wild salmon and sea trout. Farmers look to open discussion with river managers and aid in the re-stocking and stock enhancement of wild fish – where they can.

4. Do you feel that the current national collection of data on salmon operations and fish health and related matters is adequate?

Like all industries, there is always the perception that we (public) would like to have more transparency. However, data must be meaningful. The Scottish industry provides access to more data than most. Many of the farmers actually provide data over and above that which is required under present policy. They do this for customer confidence in their management and because they feel just as concerned about the environment and how it can be influenced and in turn influence their farms.

I suspect data collection will increase, be more real-time and thus create more discussion – much of it positive but also much of it will be used out of context and add further mud to the waters (no pun intended!).

What is needed is clarity on the data, and a real context to the meaning – without this, collecting more for the sake of it won't help anyone.

5. Do you have any views on whether the regulatory regime which applies to the farmed salmon industry is sufficiently robust?

To expand further from point 4, the regulations are based on the current data collection to some extent. If that data is not understood, or the modelling not suitable for the area that the data is derived from then the underpinning regulations will not be suitable.

They are presently robust enough to ensure farmers are diligent and conscientious in their operations, with strict standards and legal requirements in place already.

Further regulations, and I'm sure there will be more at some point, should be developed with industry – that will be vital- and not just imposed.

6. Do you have any comments on how the UK's departure from the European Union might impact on the farmed salmon sector?

I have concerns for the loss of any funding, issues with trade- particularly border crossings for the product.

For an export product, any change to the customs or border routes has got to be a concern.

In Summary

It is very unlikely further inshore development will allow the industry the growth it needs – there is a limited availability of new sites in these areas and the industry recognises the need to seek off-shore areas to expand.

They also recognise the need for more areas that will allow them fallow existing sites on a rotational basis, improving environmental standards even more and helping negate some of the lice challenges.

Technological development continues apace - mechanical and biological lice management, predator deterrents, improvements in equipment design, new scientifically based 3rd party modelling, Land-based post smolt RAS units (allowing larger smolt to sea, reducing the marine growth cycle) etc. will allow for the expansion into new areas with greater confidence an understanding on the effects.

Challenges will always remain, not least those with the loudest voices. Yes, there is a need for more clarity around the impacts of the industry – both positive and negative. There are very few industries that do as much internally to understand their impacts and fight for ways to reduce negatives and enhance positives, and as such they should be supported in all levels.

Innes Weir, Steinsvik UK
April 2018