

## **RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE**

### **SALMON FARMING IN SCOTLAND**

#### **SUBMISSION FROM JAMIE MCANDREW**

For ease, I have structured my response in the same numbered manner as was recommended in the call for evidence document.

1. I am an employee in a Scottish aquaculture business on the West Coast of Scotland. My passion for fish came from fishing as a youngster in the Angus and Aberdeenshire area. I am a keen advocate of the Scottish aquaculture industry and strongly believe from my own personal experience and learning, that the industry is one of Scotland's greatest and most sustainable food industries.

As each year has passed, the industry has made huge advancements, which are making the industry more sustainable and committed to further reducing its environmental impact.

It is my personal belief that Scottish Salmon Farms are being used as a scape goat for the global decline in Atlantic Salmon. Through my own knowledge and experience of the relationship between lice and Salmon, nothing adds up with the stories being told by the current media storm. Despite my open mindedness to the debate as a keen angler, the anti-fish farming lobby globally, is yet to provide evidence that open cage aquaculture is having a considerable impact on wild fish or crustacean numbers.

With wild Salmon having survived the over fishing of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they now face the following problems, to name a few:

- An increasingly efficient Mackerel fishing fleet (young Salmon feed in the same locations, same depth and are the same size as Mackerel in the North Atlantic. Sadly a bio catch that no one gets to know about).
- Acidification from forestation and global carbon dioxide emissions.
- Increasing number of hydroelectric schemes.
- Increasing predator numbers, such as seals and cormorants.
- Rising sea temperatures increasing the presence of potential diseases.

The reason I feel that the above list is relevant to the Salmon Farming enquiry, is because I believe that the aquaculture industry needs to work in collaboration with the wild fisheries lobby to help address the issues. For example this may involve in the future, re-stocking rivers with vaccinated fish and using fish farm technology to protect wild smolts from seals. The Scottish government would be well within their right to tell wild fishery lobby groups to stop barking up the wrong tree and instead collaborate with the industry, to find solutions to the problems.

2. The industries levels of production have failed to grow for many years. The 2030 strategic plan for future growth has great principals and would be a vital boost to Scotland's economy. However, at the current rate of work, the target is likely unachievable.

In my experience there are two main factors restricting the growth of the Salmon industry. The first would be environmental challenges. Salmon farmers are investing huge sums of money and other resources to react to current health challenges. As health issues have been found, the industry has moved quickly to find solutions and have carried out the extreme action of shutting down poorly performing sites.

The second factor is the current legislation surrounding the planning for new sites. The environmental performance of farms is currently heavily regulated. Strict protocols and powers are in place, to ensure the benthic and fish health management meet strict conditions. Despite the legislation and guidance being in place, all government agencies are struggling from a lack of resources and cannot process correspondence in an acceptable time frame.

3. The current health challenges are a major issue for the industry. However, since the 1970's there has been a constant development of medicines, vaccines and equipment to deal with diseases and environmental challenges.

Despite the media hype around survival on Salmon farms, it remains fact that farmed Salmon survival remains above 70%, when wild Salmon have a survival rate of between 0.5% and 5%. When compared with the poultry industry where 50% (male chickens) are killed within a few days, the Salmon industry is in comparison a great advocate for animal welfare. Sadly, the public trial by the BBC's "One show" was not forthcoming with comparisons of chemical usage and survival rates in other relevant industries or wild fish statistics.

Regulations are already in place, giving the government (Marine Scotland) powers to carry out enforcement notices on farms with severe health issues. All occurrences of new diseases are reported to Marine Scotland, and the government can access farm records at any time by the way of an unannounced inspection by the fish health inspectorate. I therefore believe that current legislation is adequate and the government must show support for Scottish aquaculture, which will give businesses confidence to invest more money in health issues in the long term.

4. As discussed in my previous point, legislative powers are already in place to ensure farms are managing health issues appropriately. The recent announcement from the SSPO regarding the publication of lice numbers, is a step in the right direction. However, the data must come with clear guidance, or the information could be used in misleading and inaccurate ways.

Salmon Farms are already required by law to report production, chemical usage, environmental impact and fish health information.

5. If the Scottish aquaculture industry is to grow further, more resources should be invested in SEPA and Marine Scotland. In particular, the fish health inspectorate should spend more time on sites to ensure farms are working to the highest standards. The extra resources would also make the planning process for new sites more efficient. This would involve higher spending from the Scottish government. But the extra resources would ensure that current legislation is being upheld and would promote Scotland, as a place to do business in the future.
6. It is currently too early in the process for me to make comments on the departure from the EU and what impact this may have on the Salmon Industry.

Jamie McAndrew  
April 2018