

RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

SALMON FARMING IN SCOTLAND

SUBMISSION FROM OTTER FERRY SEAFISH LTD

1. General views

Our company has been part of the aquaculture industry for 50 years and I personally have worked in the sector and lived on the west coast for 40 years .

We were part of, and witnessed the extraordinary growth and success of the Salmon industry . We set up a salmon hatchery in 1972 and developed land based (close containment) salmon farming in 1977. We have since pioneered halibut farming and more recently successful Cleanerfish cultivation.

The industry is young and has grown very quickly from nothing to an extremely successful multi million pound business creating valuable well paid jobs in very remote areas. The extraordinary contribution to the Highland economy is beyond dispute .

Any commercial activity including agriculture , forestry, tourism , fishing and aquaculture all have an environmental foot print . All these industries require regulation and the regulators for aquaculture have done well to keep up with the development. The regulators help the various industries protect the astonishing environment that all sectors depend on .

It is a fact that the wild salmon on the west of Scotland was in decline before the advent of salmon farming on any scale . Salmon farming may well be a contributing factor to the continuing decline along with climate change , forestry and river hydrology , agriculture (silage effluent , fertiliser enrichment, and disposal of sheep dip) widespread seal population increase , past irresponsible netting of salmon and lack of feed at sea etc .

The debate has become increasingly polarised which is not good for the industry , the wild salmon interests or the Scottish Government and the economy which it is engaged in managing. Whatever the reasons it is a natural tragedy that during our time on this planet under our stewardship we have witnessed the demise of the Wild Salmon in Scotland

The review is a good thing and if all interested parties work together constructively then we should see the continued success and expansion, in a sustainable way, of Scotlands leading food industry .

2. Expansion of Salmon Industry

There is suggestion that expansion can come from containment systems which is a simplistic view and not an immediate option but certainly it should be evaluated . I would make the following points.

a) The recirculation systems are very novel and unproven in salt water. To justify them financially they require to operate at 5 times the stocking density of the cage system which has welfare issues

b) The flow through pump systems and the recirc systems are both heavy users of power and require a lot of space on land .

c) Solid floating containers have their attraction but much development required to translate design into functional production units in very harsh environments.

Basic good practice of Loch management agreements and fallow periods have been extremely successful in the past at reducing parasite burdens but more sites are required to allow more effective fallow periods at the same time as increasing overall production .

The industry should be happy to demonstrate that health issues are under control to allow further expansion in individual areas.

3. Health and Environmental challenges

Increasing site biomass has been a convenient way for regulators and farmers to expand the industry. This has been done by increasing the number, size and depth of cages. The Fish and Fish farm Biologists (without pressure from finance departments) in conjunction with Regulatory Scientists should work closely to determine the optimum biomass for loch systems

The basic rules of livestock production would suggest more sites of lower biomass to allow good following programmes would overcome health problems whilst expanding overall production capacity .

4. Collection of data

The collection of data is more than adequate but can often be misinterpreted and used against the farmer sometimes justifiably but more often for damaging headlines . The data should be used for monitoring individual companies but also in a constructive way to give the industry and scientists an overview of the problems and to help with the solution of any problems on a national scale .

5. Regulatory System

The regulatory systems are sufficiently robust. Sepa have a difficult job to aid expansion whilst protecting the environment . Although a new industry Salmon farming has matured rapidly and has sophisticated science research capabilities both here and in Norway that the industry and regulators can draw on. Government needs to continue to aid relevant research to help the regulators and farmers to expand the industry in the sustainable way that the majority of people desire.

Scotland is recognised as a well regulated area to develop salmon farming and aquaculture . It protects the environment , the farmer, and helps to maintain the positive image of the Scottish food and drink brand across the world

6.Brexit

Scotland is the largest aquaculture producer in the EU . The natural resources of the Highlands and Islands being the envy of every other EU country.

The EU have identified Aquaculture as one of the most important areas for growth and support .

Scottish science institutes have benefitted greatly from EU partnership projects .

Individual companies have benefitted greatly from successive aid scheme the latest being the EMFF.

The Highland and Islands region receives much infrastructure support from EU .

It is unlikely that Westminster or Holyrood will be able to maintain these levels of support post Brexit.

Otter Ferry Seafish Ltd
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