

RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

SALMON FARMING IN SCOTLAND

SUBMISSION FROM THE UIG AND HAMANAVAY ESTATE (“UHE”)

The UHE owns fishing rights on the Isle of Lewis as follows:

- 2 boats on Loch Langavat (the headwaters of the Grimersta/Langavat SAC system) which are made available to the Stornoway Angling Association for the exclusive use of local anglers, each year free of charge. The Grimersta/Langavat system used to be a world famous system, but it has been seriously impacted by salmon cages/farming in Loch Roag and has lost its genetic integrity as set out below.
- the upper waters of the Morsgail system which have been seriously impacted by salmon cages/farming in or near Little Loch Roag. The comparison set out below between the Morsgail catches post salmon farming and the Hamanavay catches for the same period (where there is no adjacent fish farming), shows the serious impact at Morsgail.
- the Gisla system which was destroyed as a migratory fishery by a hydroelectric scheme.
- the Loch Croistean system which was largely destroyed by the same hydroelectric scheme. Attempts to revive it are impacted by (among other problems) salmon cages/farming in or near Little Loch Roag.
- the Red River system which has been impacted by salmon farming in or near Little Loch Roag.
- the Hamanavay system which discharges into the sea at Hamanavay well to the south of the systems listed above. There is no salmon farming in the sea lochs (Hamanavay, Tealasavay and Resort) which adjoin the Hamanavay system. As a result this system is one of the premier sea trout systems in Scotland and of national importance.

The writer of this submission has more than 30 years’ experience of managing the above systems.

The Conservation Assessment of Salmon for the 2018 season has downgraded the Langavat/Grimersta system (referred to as Langavat Special Area of Conservation) from grade 1 to grade 2 and the Loch Morsgail system from grade 2 to grade 3.

The River Blackwater (close to Grimersta to the east) was downgraded from grade 1 to grade 2.

LOSS OF GENETIC INTEGRITY IN THE GRIMERSTA/LANGAVAT SYSTEM AND DAMAGE TO THE GRIMERSTA/LANGAVAT SYSTEM

This system is (or is meant to be) a Special Area of Conservation.

In 2009 fin clips were taken from 22 salmon parr from the Langadale burn, the main spawning burn on the Grimersta/Langavat system. In 2005 samples were taken from the March Burn on Langavat.

This material was subsequently analysed by a population geneticist (not the Outer Hebrides Fisheries Trust (“OHFT”). The population geneticist produced two reports in November 2012 and February 2013.

The reports are to be found at

<http://www.outerhebridesfisheriestrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/MIAP-Genetic-Report.pdf>

<http://www.outerhebridesfisheriestrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/OHFT-FASMOP-report.pdf>

Of the 22 samples taken in 2009 from the Langadale River, 14 were of Scottish origin and 8 showed signs of admixture ie farmed/wild hybrids. Of 21 samples taken from the March Burn in 2005, 3 showed signs of admixture. [See OHFT 2013 Review page 12].

In the OHFT Review for 2013 first handed out in April 2014, the OHFT biologist wrote “The degree of admixture within samples varied with the Langadale River showing the greatest number of individuals with mixed Scottish/Norwegian ancestry (57%)....The high degree of admixture that was evident in samples taken from the Langadale River [is] of particular concern to OHFT as this system is situated at the head of Loch Langabhat, a loch with SAC status because of its Atlantic salmon populations.”

The reference to 57% was an error. The figure should be 37% not 57%. In any event it is extremely serious.

UHE agrees with what the OHFT biologist said - this is a matter of very considerable concern.

Some of the owners of fishing on Loch Langavat -Aline, Morsgail, Soval and UHE first learnt of this very serious information at the end of April 2014.

There is only one explanation for the damage to the genetic integrity of fish in the Grimersta/Langavat system. It is that there has been inter-breeding between wild fish and fish that have escaped from fish farms in or near Loch Roag.

In 1925 Grimersta alone (ie not including other estates with fishing rights on Langavat) according to Jones [below] caught 2276 salmon and 591 sea trout.

For the last 5 years the Grimersta fishings have averaged 278 salmon and 178 sea trout fishing 8+ rods per day six days a week. The figure of 178 sea trout may include finnock.

A COMPARISON OF MORSGAIL AND HAMAAYVAY SEA TROUT AND FINNOCK CATCHES PRE AND POST SALMON FARMING

By analysis of the records of catches

- (a) on the Morsgail and Hamanavay systems/fishings pre any salmon farming and
- (b) post the impact of salmon farming adjoining the Morsgail system but NOT the Hamanavay system,

- it is possible to show by irrefutable evidence the detrimental effect that salmon farming has had on the Morsgail system (in relation to salmon and most importantly in relation to sea trout and finnock)

-whereas the Hamanavay system (free from fish farming) has in comparison prospered, particularly in runs of sea trout and finnock.

NOTE salmon farming impacted the Morsgail system but NOT the Hamanavay system.

PRE SALMON FARMING FIGURES

The pre-salmon farming Morsgail figures are taken from 'The Sporting Estates of the Outer Hebrides Past and Present' by D.S.D.Jones 2008.

Morsgail

1880 492 sea trout

1888 1,045 sea trout

1930 360 sea trout

1955 526 sea trout and finnock

Hamanavay

well below the Morsgail figures

POST SALMON FARMING

2014 83 sea trout

2015 388 sea trout

2016 62 sea trout

2017 25 sea trout

NO SALMON FARMING

412 sea trout and 821 finnock

529 sea trout and 562 finnock

373 sea trout and 500 finnock

337 sea trout and 386 finnock

Some footnotes should be added to the above figures.

They evidence the fact that sea trout and finnock (which spend their lives at sea close to their natal rivers) are seriously impacted by lice and other factors, caused by cages/fish farms in the sea lochs they frequent when at sea.

It is important to note that before salmon farming, most of the fish caught were taken/killed. The runs of migratory fish remained strong, despite the annual harvest.

Post salmon farming the practice has been to return all sea trout and finnock. Thus the post salmon farming Morsgail (and Hamanavay) figures were obtained by returning all sea trout and finnock. Now there is no annual harvest.

Thus the pre salmon farming figures should be read with the footnote –‘these figures allowed a significant annual harvest’ and the post salmon farming figures should be read with the footnote ‘despite no annual harvest.’

The Morsgail 2015 catch was out of line. In the opinion of the writer it is explained by the fact that salmon cages (or some of them) in or near Little Loch Roag which impact the migratory fishing on the Morsgail system, had been fallowed for a previous year or years.

It is unclear from the Fish Hebrides website whether the total Morsgail figures shown do or do not include finnock. It is elementary that in assessing the welfare of a sea trout fishery it is necessary to record and include all finnock caught, as well as all sea trout caught.

Some figures for the Hamanavay system (when BOTH the Morsgail and Hamanavay systems were NOT impacted by salmon farming), are available. They show that in broad terms the Hamanavay catch of sea trout and finnock was well below that of the Morsgail system, when the Morsgail system was not impacted by salmon farming.

The 2014 to 2017 Hamanavay figures are total estate figures (and include a few fish caught on Loch Cragach), but the vast majority of the sea trout and finnock catch came from the Hamanavay system.

The Hamanavay system is lightly fished because UHE has extensive stalking with a required annual cull of about 40 stags and a larger number of hinds. Accommodation in the house is limited. After the start of the stalking/shooting season many parties stalk and shoot as well as fish. In some weeks at this time of the year there is very little, if any, fishing.

The totality of the UHE Langavat fishings is made available to local people. A significant amount of local access is made available on the UHE fishings, other than Langavat.

The purpose of the above figures is to evidence the clear trend of serious damage to migratory fishing by salmon farming as presently conducted.

ESCAPES FROM SALMON FARMS

The very considerable annual figures for these are available from websites. The actual number of escapees is likely to be far higher than the reported number.

EVIDENCE FROM OTHER COUNTRIES

The clear trend of serious damage from inadequately regulated salmon farming to migratory systems is evident elsewhere in Scotland and in other countries. The writer has knowledge of Lough Currane in south west Ireland. This lough (as the extensive literature shows) used to offer the finest sea trout fishing in Ireland. The impact of inadequately regulated salmon farming close to the outlet from the system which includes Lough Currane, has virtually destroyed the sea trout run into Lough Currane. Convincing evidence of this is obtained by talking to the local boatmen, who are finding it increasingly difficult to make any living from taking visitors out on Lough Currane.

CONCLUSION

It will be seen from the above that salmon farming in Loch Roag and Little Loch Roag and thereabouts has had, and is having, a very serious impact on local anglers. As set out above local anglers have EXCLUSIVE use of UHE's 2 boats on Langavat and significant access to UHE's other fishings. Local anglers (and visiting anglers) like to take a fish home. But the damage caused by fish farming has meant that it is increasingly difficult to allow this. The 2018 downgrading of the fisheries referred to above underlines this point.

Jobs or part jobs depend on the viability of the fishings. The fishings also bring in significant tourism etc to the Isle of Lewis.

It is recognised that salmon farming provides much needed employment.

The way forward is as follows.

The damage done to the wild salmon and sea trout fisheries by salmon farming needs to be recognised.

Salmon farming should be carried out at a safe distance well away from migratory fishings, and salmon should be reared in (and related sea lice contained in) closed container systems.

Those engaged in salmon farming should be required to deposit with Marine Scotland or other appropriate body, samples of the genetic make up etc of all salmon held in containers, so that if there is an escape, the escape can be traced to a particular farm/operator. In the event of an escape, the operator should be required to pay for all necessary remedial action, in addition to appropriate compensation.

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The Uig and Hamanavay Estate ("UHE")
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