

RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

SALMON FARMING IN SCOTLAND

SUBMISSION FROM UNST PARTNERSHIP LTD

Salmon Farming in Unst, Shetland

Unst Partnership Ltd was set up in 2000 when the island's Baltasound airport had closed to oil related traffic with the departure of Chevron (1995) and when the downturn at RAF Saxa Vord Radar base began, in 2000. By 2005 the RAF operation had ended, with no staff based here. In that period, our population dropped from 1200 to 600. It is still at that rough figure today, at 650.

The Partnership was set up with assistance from HIE and the local Shetland Islands Council to try to find other jobs, training, business advice, business premises, grant aid, etc to improve the lot of islanders. We presently run a Skip Scheme, Community allotments, a printing/photocopying service, print an annual tourist map and act as a point of contact for businesses, organisations and individuals interested in living, working in or visiting Unst. We intend to create a second hand shop in part of our office through grant aid from the Scottish Land Fund.

Salmon Farming has been one of the big success stories for Shetland since the 1990's. Often begun by crofters seeking to diversify, it is now a multinational business with (in the past) Norwegian and Polish owners and now a Canadian company, Cooke Aquaculture, involved in the business. There are hardly any locally owned salmon businesses left in Shetland as the multi-nationals have greater buying power and vertical integration from providing feed sacks to stocking supermarket shelves.

Despite this lack of local control, the companies involved have found Shetland conditions to be excellent for farmed salmon. There is no wild salmon population here to be disturbed and the tides and unpolluted seas mean that fish are in good condition here. The volume of salmon being exported daily from Shetland is vitally important to our island economy and produces a lot of well paid jobs. Farmed salmon is now popular and affordable to be found in every super-market in the UK and beyond. It is a healthy product and has a good name across the world.

Cooke employ a large number of people here on Unst at their hatchery and sea sites, as well as providing factory work at their processing plant in Yell, which some Unst residents travel to for work.

They have been very good at supporting local business ventures, sponsoring sports and voluntary groups and have a good record of animal welfare. Their cages and their operation are far superior to the fairly basic, labour intensive set-up that we saw in the early years. Technology means that feeding and monitoring are carefully controlled by IT. The cages are well constructed and can handle the very harsh weather conditions that can occur here. (See the notorious storm on Christmas Day

2012 <http://www.shetnews.co.uk/news/4560-lessons-will-be-learned-from-salmon-cage-loss> when the cages, owned then by Meridian Salmon, were washed out to sea.) Since then, companies have been even more safety conscious about site management.

The small harbour in Uyeasound, at the south end of the island, was replaced by a brand new pier in 2009 which shelters several salmon boats and protects a local marina. (<http://www.shetlandtimes.co.uk/2009/05/01/a-day-to-remember-in-uyeasound-as-pier-first-mooted-after-the-war-finally-opens>) The warehouse and factory near the pier mean that transferring feed to the cages and transferring fish to well boats for export is a well-run operation worth millions of pounds to the local economy.

We would argue that Cooke have a well-managed business here with good quality management from Hatchery through to export. They have spent extensively on a salmon processing plant on the neighbouring island of Yell and, with the high price of quality Shetland salmon, are bringing excellent returns on the world market.

We urge you to support aquaculture in this area as it is one of the key sources of employment and of quality food supplies in Shetland.

Unst Partnership Ltd
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