

## **RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE**

### **SALMON FARMING IN SCOTLAND**

#### **SUBMISSION FROM WILL JEWISON**

I have been involved in the Scottish aquaculture industry from the late 1970's through to the present day either directly or as part of the supply industry. In that time I have seen a dramatic increase in the production of farmed salmon and also in the development and technology which has allowed this increase to produce what is a premium Scottish product that is enjoyed and valued globally.

I came to this industry in 1978 and it has gone through periods of both highs and lows where diseases such as *Aeromonas salmonicida* threatened to wipe out the industry until vaccines were developed and are continuing to be developed as Multivalent vaccines for the control of several significant salmon viral pathogens. Today antibiotic usage is greatly reduced, well-regulated and is not used prophylactically as suggested by some. Yes there are significant concerns around sea lice and their impact in salmon farming. However the industry is continuing to look and invest heavily in ways to minimise the use of treatments by using cleaner fish, mechanical / thermal removal, functional feeds and cage design. Lice settlement does affect fish health and performance and it is therefore a priority for the industry to minimise this challenge and increase its viability and profitability.

It is interesting to look at other forms of livestock production and ask why there is not the same negativity from NGO's. I ask this – when you walk through a field of cattle how long does a cow pat last and when did you last see a Yellow Dung Fly. In most cases today the answer is likely to be 'months and what is a Dung Fly?' Back in the 1970's it was a couple of weeks and the flies were on every pat. I quote this as no one questions the chemical treatments applied to farm animals as critically as they do with salmon.

An SRUC report from 2015 shows data from Dwyer et al<sup>1</sup> of an average annual lamb mortality of 14% since 1970 with a couple of years at over 50%. A recent Landward programme also suggested up to 50% losses in sheep livestock when put out on the hill with no real understanding as to the cause of these losses, hence the need for research. Aquaculture would not have received the same positive spin for this level of mortality.

<sup>1</sup> [www.nationalsheep.org.uk](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk)

One area that has not been fully appreciated by the public and NGO's is that the pen farming operations provide a superb and very diverse habitat for a large number of macro and micro flora and fauna. I am not doubting the effect that faecal waste from salmon farms can have on a localised section of the sea bed. However, having studied as a biologist and also a keen naturalist, I am always amazed at the productivity on and around the pens, mooring ropes and feed barges ranging from

zooplankton, crustaceans, sea squirts and Plumose anemones to dolphins, white tailed eagles and basking sharks. Many of these species cannot be seen close up from a walk along the shore and unfortunately, for the public, access is not allowed to the farms due to H&S.

The shooting of seals has and will continue to be a bone of contention with many thinking and saying that seals are shot regularly and not as a last resort. To those people I ask why is the aquaculture industry investing millions of pounds in pen design and seal deterrent systems when it would be far cheaper to buy a bullet and remove a seal? I have unfortunately witnessed, many years ago (1988), the effect of a bull grey seal on a pen of salmon where overnight several hundred salmon were killed or severely wounded. Thankfully pen design improvements now prevents, or at worst minimises, these attacks. I would also argue that there **is** a healthy seal population throughout the West coast of Scotland and they must be considered as part of the damaging effect on wild salmon and sea trout numbers which leads to diminishing catches from migratory rivers. The same situation and impact on wild stocks must also be applicable to the healthy seal populations along the East coast estuaries such as the Cromarty Firth and Tentsmuir Point, Tayside.

There will always be a vocal brigade who oppose the salmon aquaculture industry but it is some of them that for generations have continually caught and killed wild salmon coming back to spawn without a second thought for the effect that removing each fish has on the wild population where any successful spawning may only provide a 1% survival to maturity. It is also the 'Bad news is Good news' views that make the national headlines while aquaculture receives no positive headlines from farms showing single figure % mortalities, low lice counts and a low feed conversion rate producing a highly sustainable and healthy product that should be celebrated.

Salmon aquaculture has allowed the last couple of generations in rural communities to stay and bring up their children and improve the economic viability in these fragile socio-economic areas. It has also welcomed members of the EU community and beyond to work and integrate into the West of Scotland and the Isles. Aquaculture and its proposed development should be seen in a positive light as to the economic benefits it brings to both local businesses but also further afield with logistics, boat building, equipment supply and fish processing. It is interesting to hear that often with new site applications it is supported positively by locals and local business but negatively by those who visit for leisure and pleasure.

Salmon aquaculture in Scotland has made significant improvements since its inception but it still has its problems and issues in the areas of health and the environment. However with sensible, well thought out regulation, best practice and management, aquacultures continued growth and sustainability within Scotland should be welcomed for the benefits it brings to the Highland and Island communities as well as Scotland as a whole.

Will Jewison  
April 2018