

Salmon & Trout Association
Greathill House
Stirling
FK7 9QS

The Chairman
Petitions Committee
Scottish Parliament
Holyrood
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

20 August 2010

Dear Sir,

Petition PE1336

I am writing in response to the letter you received from Mr James A. Mackie on 18 July 2010 re the above petition.

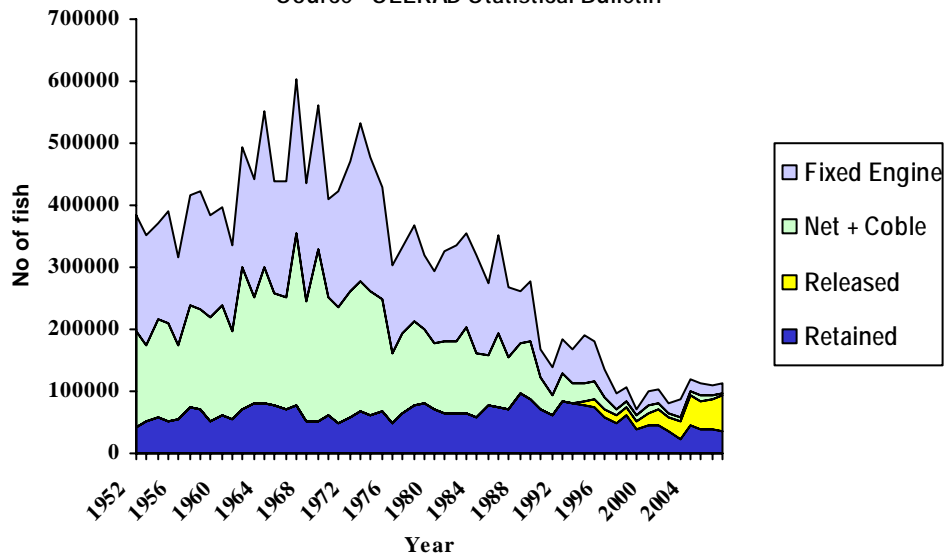
In his letter Mr Mackie raised a number of points which are incorrect and therefore I have laid out the true position below.

1. Mr Mackie states that wild Atlantic salmon stocks have been falling since the late 1950's and early 1960's. This is quite simply not the case and the graphs below (based on Government statistics) show the true position on the west coast of Scotland. Whilst all wild populations naturally fluctuate the graphs clearly show a massive and sustained decline that coincides with the establishment of marine based fish farms.

The figures could not be clearer. In fact the trend from 1952 for the whole of Scotland was most definitely upwards and there was no decline until the mid 1970s. Furthermore the graph for those areas of the west Highlands and Islands affected by salmon farming shows that there was no decline before 1979 and that this only escalated from the late 1980s, coinciding closely with the major expansion of the salmon farming industry.

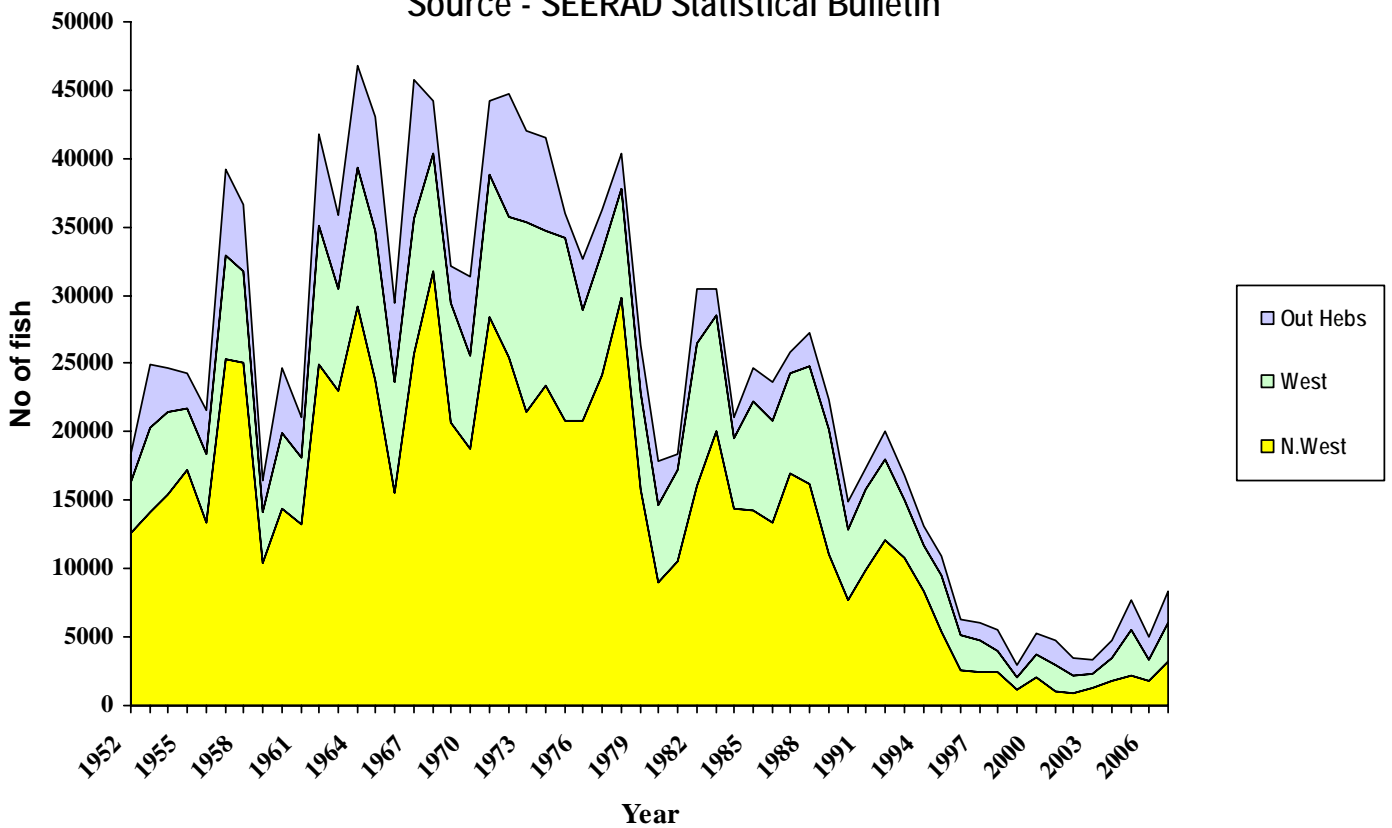
National Salmon All Methods Catch Statistics Scotland, 1952-2007

Source - SEERAD Statistical Bulletin



National Salmon All Methods Catch Statistics N.W / W & Outer Hebrides 1952-2007

Source - SEERAD Statistical Bulletin



2. Mr Mackie states that farmed salmon are free of sea lice when transferred to salt water cages and that the infection therefore comes from wild fish. Whilst it is true that sea lice occur naturally, this is not the issue. Farmed salmon are reared in very high concentrations per cage and it is this that causes the massive explosion in sea lice and the associated problems. These lice then attach themselves to the wild smolt population as they migrate through the fish farm areas to their feeding grounds. There is a huge amount of published (and peer reviewed) scientific research that shows that the infection of smolts by even relatively small numbers of sea lice will cause their death. Infection levels can be so high that the vast majority of the smolts die and therefore very few adult salmon will be available to return to spawn. Research also shows that where a fish farm is being followed, and therefore the sea lice are at more natural levels, then there is little or no issue over smolt survival.
3. Mr Mackie appears to blame the netting of larger salmon for the overall decline of wild salmon numbers and weights as only smaller salmon survive to spawn. This argument is fundamentally flawed. Netting is not normally selective in the size of fish taken. Also the netting season is restricted by law and therefore during the close season all sizes of salmon can run the river to spawn. Similarly there is now relatively little netting undertaken in Scottish waters and especially on the west coast.
4. Mr Mackie states that the Salmon & Trout Association encourages the stocking of trout and other species in Scottish waters. This is simply not true. The Salmon & Trout Association is an environmental charity that is heavily involved in issues relating to the control of indiscriminate stocking and sits on Government working groups to this end.
5. The issue of genetic purity of wild salmon stocks in Scotland and the rest of the UK is fully recognised by all organisations working within fisheries management. If farmed smolts escape from their freshwater cages there is no question that they will cause huge environmental problems. Research shows that this has already happened in at least one river system.
6. Mr Mackie states that the maintenance of spawning grounds etc. is being ignored. This is simply not true and shows a lack of understanding of what is happening in fisheries management in Scotland. Scotland is covered by a huge network of Fishery Trusts that carry out massive amounts of improvements and monitoring of rivers. This work is funded by both the private sector and the Scottish Government. Similarly published research clearly states that whilst there are individual problems on individual rivers there is nothing fundamentally wrong with west coast rivers as a complete entity.

I hope the above clarifies the relevant points raised in Mr Mackie's letter.

Yours faithfully

George Holdsworth MIFM

Scottish Policy Officer
Salmon & Trout Association