

RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

SALMON FARMING IN SCOTLAND

SUBMISSION FROM ACOURA LTD

I would like to submit a response to the committee on behalf of Acoura Ltd. and in support of the Scottish salmon farming industry as a result of our interaction and work with the sector for over 30 years.

Acoura is a Scottish based company that owes its initial existence to the development of the farmed salmon industry in Scotland. Originally called Food Certification Scotland the company was created as a result of the decision early on in the sectors development to produce their farmed salmon according to recognised product quality standards that include full traceability and which allow independent inspection and confirmation of the quality of Scottish farmed salmon production practices when set against its competitors. This ability to demonstrate the provenance and quality of Scottish farmed salmon product and production methods has been one of the major factors behind the success Scottish farmed salmon commands in both the UK and wider international markets today.

In the mid-1990s the precursor of the Scottish Salmon Producers Organisation (SSPO) developed and launched a small number of Product Certification Schemes that its members were required to participate in as a member of the organisation. These were among the first such quality schemes launched in the food sector in the UK. The two main Standards were the Tartan Quality Mark under which Scottish farmed salmon was marketed in the UK and the Label Rouge Quality Mark which is a French government recognised quality mark for the marketing of food products into the French market.

For these standards to meet the requirements of what is known as an EN45011 (now ISO17065) accredited third party Product Certification Scheme it is required that the participants (farms, harvesting stations, packing plants and secondary processing plants) in the Schemes are independently inspected and certified against a rigorous set of Production and Quality Standards.

Both the standards and the certification bodies that carry out the inspection and certification of participating salmon farms have to be accredited (approved) by UKAS (the United Kingdom Accreditation Service) as meeting the requirements of ISO17065. The underlying criteria of this requirement being to ensure that an technically competent, independent, transparent and consistent process is in place to assess participants against their compliance with the requirements using trained and competent auditors who have in the past had practical experience of working within the aquaculture sector.

It this role as a contracted independent inspection and certification body that Food Certification Scotland, now Acoura Ltd., was formed and contracted to undertake the

inspection and certification of the Tartan Quality Mark and Label Rouge Product Certification Schemes.

For 21 years, despite occasional open tender renewal processes, Acoura has held the contract to inspect and certify members of SSPO against the their Label Rouge and more recently the Code of Good Practice for Scottish Finfish Aquaculture.

In addition the Scottish farmed salmon industry also participates in a number of other voluntary international standards that are delivered mostly by Acoura as well as other certifiers and which are recognised in both the domestic and international market. For example GlobalGAP, Aquaculture Stewardship Council, Global Aquaculture Alliance Best Aquaculture Practice, Protected Geographic Indication, Traceability standards, RSPCA Assured and others.

Over the last 20 years Acoura as now grown to become a market leader in the delivery of these independent accredited certification schemes to the international aquaculture, fisheries, agriculture, food processing as well as food service and retail sectors sectors with clients in 40 countries. In December 2016 Acoura Ltd., became part of the UK based Lloyds Register Group (www.lr.org).

The point I wish to make to the committee is that consumer demand for high quality Scottish salmon continues to grow both in domestic and overseas markets. Salmon is the most popular fish in the UK shopping basket and increasingly important as a major export product globally. Its full traceability, provenance and quality production practices ensure that it commands a premium in many high value international markets.

To maintain this and grow the Scottish farmed salmon sector must continue to comply with these various quality Standards and Schemes that are being demanded as a prerequisite these were some of the first such quality schemes launched in the food sector in the UK be about to supply to major players in the supply chain, and particularly by the retailers.

Acoura carries out several hundred farmed based audits annually on Scottish producers, this cover close to 100% of all Scottish based salmon farms at least annually, and in some cases visits are carried out more often.

These sites are visited by auditors all of whom have many years' experience with the sector earlier in the careers, all of whom are trained auditors and follow the rigorous inspection practices required of them to ensure that Scottish salmon farms earn the right to be allowed to market their product under the various quality logos and brands.

In my experience and we are active in most aquaculture production regions globally, this constitutes some of the most rigorous independent oversight of aquaculture practices, let alone farmed salmon production, in place in any country globally.

The industry has always in my experience, through its technical committees with whom we interact, striven to ensure that the content of the standards under its control, namely Label Rouge, CoGP, PGI reflect best industry practice and more than that reflect a wish and intention to ensure the industry addresses the issues and reflect the concerns of all stakeholders to ensure that Scottish farmed salmon continues to be produced using industry best practice in a sustainable way that minimises environmental impact, ensures high animal as well as social welfare standards are in place, demonstrates clear traceability and provenance of a what is acknowledged as a world class healthy high quality food product.

There is always room to raise the bar through regular review of the content and requirement of these third party product quality standards to allow the industry to demonstrate compliance in meeting new challenges as they arise and in my opinion and experience the Scottish farmed salmon sector has relevant mechanisms in place and continues to demonstrate its commitment to ensure it meets both its goals but also its responsibilities.

Martin Gill, Head of Fisheries and Aquaculture, Acoura Ltd.
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