

The Town and Country Planning (Marine Fish Farming) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2025

Response from Highland Council

Do you agree with local authorities being designated as the planning authority for considering proposals aquaculture developments from 3-12 nautical miles?

Extending marine planning zones to 12 nautical miles help eliminate the current regulatory gap and ensure that all aquaculture development within this range is assessed under a consistent and coherent planning framework. Local authorities are well positioned to consider the socio-economic impacts of aquaculture on coastal communities. Aligning planning responsibilities out to 12 nm would allow local authorities to assess proposals in the same way they currently do within the 0-3nm range, providing stronger alignment with Local Development Plans and better reflection of local community interest.

At present, local authorities often encounter competing interests with other forms of development not decided at local level such as renewable energy - both onshore and offshore installations. Whereby there is a perception within some local communities that they are subject to these major developments without their concerns being adequately listened to with little meaningful benefit to affected residents.

Local authorities understand the interests and sensitivities of their communities, including the environmental impact on local designations and special features. We work in close collaboration with NatureScot, SEPA, Marine Scotland, Crown Estate, community councils and other statutory/non statutory consultees to ensure that development proposals are appropriate for local contexts. This includes consideration of all users of the marine environment and cumulative impacts within local waters.

There is a concern that removing decision-making powers from local authorities would weaken the representation of community views and diminish consideration of locally important environmental and social factors. Keeping the planning decision at the local level helps ensure that proposals out to 12 nm are subject to robust, place-based scrutiny in the public interest.

Are you content with the proposed boundaries of marine planning zones under the SSI?

Yes

Do you have any other concerns or views on the SSI, particularly with regards to cost and resource/expertise implications for local authority planning departments?

Offshore aquaculture remains in the early stages of development, with no current offshore farms operating in Scotland and only a limited number established

internationally, such as in Norway. A rapid transition to offshore farming is not anticipated in the near term, and a significant influx of applications is considered unlikely at this stage. The rate of applications will be monitored closely, and the planning authority will collocate resources, accordingly, scaling up support as demand evolves over time.