

To the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee

5<sup>th</sup> March 2026

Further to the meeting of the Rural Affairs & Islands Committee of Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> February 2026, I would like to make the following points:

1. On Friday 27<sup>th</sup> February 2026, the Scottish Government published the provisional catch data for wild salmon and sea trout caught by rod and line. The total catch of wild salmon was 28,020 which is 40% down on the 2024 catch and 14% lower than the worst ever total catch.

When the catch is divided between east and west coast rivers, the decline in the east where there is no salmon farming was 43%, whilst the catch from rivers in the west coast salmon farming area was down only 29%.

The original inquiry in 2018 was prompted by a complaint from Salmon & Trout Conservation, the representative organisation for anglers and now called Wild Fish, who claimed that sea lice associated with salmon farms were responsible for the decline in west coast rivers. No-one in any of the subsequent sessions has ever tried to quantify how many wild salmon die from infestation due to sea lice in Scotland. There is always just a reference to the risk of dying but no evidence of how many fish have died

Dr Alan Wells told the committee that wild salmon are species in crisis. In 2025, the rod catch of this species in crisis from west coast rivers was 4598 fish salmon. Of these 30 fish were killed to eat. A further 548 fish were at risk of dying from mortality associated with catch and release.

2. At the beginning of the meeting, the Convenor highlighted the need to improve public and consumer confidence. As Ben Hadfield mentioned, public and consumer confidence in farmed salmon is high. Of 190,000 tonnes of fresh and chilled seafood bought in the 12 months to the end of January, 37% was farmed salmon. By comparison just 10% was cod, the next biggest seller.

The public and consumers that contact the Committee are not interested in buying or eating farmed salmon. In fact, Wild Fish are running campaigns to try to persuade consumers to stop eating farmed salmon in the mistaken belief that this might help wild salmon stocks recover. As stated above, wild salmon catches are at their lowest number ever and especially from the east coast rivers where there is no salmon farming. The members of the public that contact the RAIC Committee have, for reasons best known to themselves, no confidence in salmon farming. No discussion by the Committee will ever change their view.

3. The committee discussed the issue of escapes, but are probably unaware that the leading Norwegian researcher into escapes published a new paper at the end of 2025 in which he suggested that the impacts of escapes on wild fish populations have been highly overstated.

Dr Martin Jaffa

Callander McDowell.