



Clerks to the Committee
Rural Affairs & Islands Committee
The Scottish Parliament

09 February 2026

Dear Clerks

Salmon farming in Scotland Inquiry by Rural Affairs Committee: submission from the Sustainable Inshore Fisheries Trust - February 2026

The Sustainable Inshore Fisheries Trust commends the Committee on its continuing inquiry into the salmon farming sector in Scotland.

SIFT's wishes to draw the Committee's attention to two important outstanding issues relating to the sector:

- the longstanding failure by the Scottish Government to assess the economic impact that the sector has on the Scottish economy;
- the sector's role in driving demand for unsustainably caught wrasse, for use as cleaner fish.

We set out below a summary of our concerns on these issues. Given the extent of these concerns, as well as the concerns expressed by other stakeholders on issues such as salmon and wrasse mortality rates within farms, fish welfare in cages, sea lice numbers, escapes of farmed salmon and feedstock supply issues, **SIFT strongly recommends that a moratorium on the development of new open cage marine salmon farms, and the extension of existing open cage marine salmon farms, be implemented at the first opportunity.**

Economic impacts of salmon farming

In November 2025, SIFT and Wildfish published an independent report into the economic impacts of Scottish salmon farming. The report can be found here: [Assessing the Economic Impact of Salmon Farming in Skye & Lochalsh - Report](#).

The report was commissioned in response to the failure by the Scottish Government, and the industry itself, to undertake a comprehensive Cost Benefit Analysis of its economic impacts. Contrary to the requirements of HM Treasury's Green Book, the Scottish Government has to date only published benefit analyses - which fail to consider the costs the industry imposes upon other stakeholders.

The report, which was authored by Dr Andrew Moxey, the former Chief Agricultural Economist for the Scottish Government and Prof Angela Tregear of Edinburgh University Business School, used Skye and Lochalsh as a case study for the national picture and found that:

- industry figures **exaggerate its economic benefits by focussing on gross rather than net benefits and disregarding counterfactuals and the sector's costs on other economic sectors:**
- **In particular, headline estimates do not take account of displacement effects** on other businesses competing with salmon farms for marine and coastal space, environmental resources and labour.
- Rigorous economic impact assessment of net benefits is hampered by an **over reliance on self-reporting and the absence of granular economic data for sectors other than salmon farming.**

The report provided the first estimates of the **jobs lost in other sectors as a result of salmon farming**. Against a **background of falling salmon farming production jobs nationally over the last decade**, the report estimates that approximately 137 people currently work in the industry in Skye & Lochalsh. However, the report estimates that **salmon farming has cost between 12 and 38 jobs locally in other sectors, including in mussel farming, creeling and marine tourism, all of which have markedly lower environmental impacts than open cage salmon farming.**

The report also noted that:

- **The profits and dividends paid by the multinational corporations which own almost all of Scotland's salmon farms are typically declared abroad and hence leak outside the Scottish economy;**
- **These multinational salmon farming corporations receive substantial Scottish and UK tax credits and grants, with reported figures showing that in some years some firms receive more than they pay in tax;**
- **The industry requires extensive government oversight, which is funded from the public purse;**
- **Salmon farms have been exempt from local business rates since 1981;**
- **Voluntary community benefit sharing by aquaculture companies, both in cash and in-kind, is relatively small compared to industry profitability and typically not determined by communities themselves.**

To address these significant concerns, SIFT recommends that:

- **Governance arrangements for the sector be improved, with the following needing urgent review:**
 - reliance upon self-reporting by farms,
 - lack of clarity about respective roles and responsibilities for different public bodies,
 - the consultation response burden on communities.
- **The Scottish Government could more clearly articulate the trade-offs between different policy objectives and how these should translate into spatial prioritisation and targeting for Local Authorities reacting to license applications.**
- **The Scottish Government adheres to official HM Treasury published guidance for economic appraisal, monitoring and evaluation and undertakes a cost benefit analysis of the sector.**

The wrasse fishery

The Scottish wrasse fishery provides the Scottish salmon aquaculture sector with wrasse for use as “cleaner fish” to control sea lice in open cage salmon farms. Whilst the Scottish Government responded in 2025 to calls to restrict wrasse fishing within certain Special Areas of Conservation, there remain serious concerns that **the fishery continues to be unsustainable**. With open-cage salmon farming projected to expand, there are fears that this problem will worsen. This risks further depletion of wild wrasse stocks and adverse impacts upon the ecosystems in which wrasse are found. **The problems associated with sea lice infestations, and hence the need to harvest wild wrasse, are a direct consequence of the salmon farming sector's continued use of open cages and its refusal to adopt closed containment.**

The key continuing failings of the wrasse fishery are:

- **No stock assessments are undertaken of wrasse species;**
- **No Total Allowable Catch (TAC) has been set for wrasse fisheries;**
- **Negligible monitoring and enforcement is undertaken of the wrasse fishery**

In addition, Scottish Government Marine Directorate continues to either **overlook or misinterpret published scientific evidence regarding when wrasse both mature and spawn**. As a consequence:

- **the wrasse fishery, which operates from May to November, continues to be permitted during the wrasse spawning season** for each of the wrasse species (Ballan wrasse, Corkwing wrasse, Goldsinny wrasse and Rock Cook wrasse) targeted in Scotland.
- **Ballan wrasse (the primary species of wrasse caught in Scottish waters) are targeted before they have reached maturity.**

The issues around the wrasse fishery are set out in greater detail in [The continuing mismanagement of the Scottish Wrasse Fishery](#) . SIFT strongly recommends that the Committee recognises that the threats to the inshore ecosystem arising from the poorly managed wrasse fishery stem directly from the failings of the Scottish Government Marine Directorate and the **operational decisions of the Scottish salmon farming sector**.

In view of the foregoing issues, it is now vital that the Scottish Government introduces:



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- effective measures to manage the fishery, through a dedicated **Fishery Management Plan for Wrasse**, as is being introduced in English waters,
- **a moratorium on the development of new open cage marine salmon farms, and the extension of existing open cage marine salmon farms, at the first opportunity.**

Yours sincerely

Charles Millar

Executive Director
Sustainable Inshore Fisheries Trust
5 Rose Street
Edinburgh
EH2 2PR