

Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee

Environmental impacts of salmon farming

Written submission from Douglas Chirside

Firstly thank you for giving the public the chance to comment on the environmental Impacts of salmon farming in Scotland.

As an ex shellfish farmer I have witnessed the expansion of salmon farming from its infancy with single “one man band’ operations using wooden cages buoyed with polystyrene floats and hand feeding of fish in an unsustainable manner— to the present day practice of housing fish in state of the art, all weather containment systems with automatic feeders and underwater video surveillance systems to monitor the salmon 24/7 everyday of the year.

To say the salmon farming industry has not improved its practice year on year would be untruthful and simply wrong.

With national and international companies now operating most of the fish farms in Scotland there is every likely hood Scotland can take a leading role as a world class supplier of sustainable food production and thus helping to meet the every increasing demand for responsible sourced low carbon food.

Scotland has a chance to set the bar high and not leave it to boom and bust economies with wandered environmental policy.

Building on the current innovations that have taken place and the willingness of the salmon industry to embrace new technology I feel further expansion can take place without having a detrimental effect on the natural environment.

The increased use of wrasse and lumpsucker fish as a tool to manage sea lice numbers shows just this willingness.

Concerns as to what happens to the mature wrasse and lumpsuckers after there usefulness as cleaner fish has passed is an issue and concern to the public and industry. If they cannot be released in to the wild because of bio security issues then they will have a value as either a protein source in the feed industry or as happens with other fish species (saithe) that congregate around the edges of fish farms be sold to local fishermen for creel bait.

The issue of the Impact of salmon farming on wild salmon and sea trout does in my view require further research. The now banned drift net fishery, bag net and illegal monofilament net fisheries all made a huge impact on wild salmon and sea trout stocks. It is perfectly possible (like the cod fishery of the Grand Banks off Newfoundland) that the numbers of wild salmon may never recover without some form of restocking taking place on individual rivers.

Wild salmon and sea trout have a large migratory footprint and predation takes place out on the open sea by man and other mammals making this a much more complex study to accurately document.

If the salmon industry was found to be responsible for a drop in numbers of wild salmon and sea trout who better than the salmon industry its self to take on the task of a breeding program to restock the rivers with parr and smolts produced from the eggs of native river broodstock.

The pressures on wild fish stocks to meet the demand for fish feed and omega 3 fish oils is and should be of concern to the industry looking to the future.

I am aware as an individual of different projects to help meet this increased demand. Production of soldier flies fed on food waste, a fermentation process to produce proteins for all types of terrestrial and marine animal/fish feed products and the growth of marine algae to produce omega 3 oils will become available in the near future.

Finally with regard to cetaceans and their interactions with salmon farms, I know of two separate semi permanent dolphin populations that live near by salmon farms, one in the Sound of Gigha and the other in the Sound of Luing.

From a laymans view point it would seem they benefit from salmon farms and the wild fish that congregate nearby.

I live and work on and in the Sound of Jura which is within an MPA. I see no reason why salmon farms can not be sited with in these waters.

Taking a "learn as you go approach" reacting when conditions change and admitting when there is something wrong is a necessary function of everyday life here on the west coast of Scotland.