

Rural Affairs and Islands Committee

14th Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Wednesday, 10 May

Salmon Farming in Scotland

Introduction

1. The Committee reviewed options for future work on salmon farming at its meeting on 30 November 2022 and agreed to hold an evidence session with the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands. The evidence session will focus on the Scottish Government's progress in responding to the recommendations made by the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee (RECC) in its session 5 inquiry report on salmon farming in Scotland and Professor Griggs's regulatory review of aquaculture.

Background

Committee work on Salmon Farming in Session 5

2. In Session 5, the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee (ECCLRC) carried out work on the environmental impacts of salmon farming, [commissioning the Scottish Association of Marine Science \(SAMS\) to review the evidence around this topic](#). It subsequently issued a [call for stakeholder views on the findings of the SAMS review](#).
3. The [ECCLRC stated in its letter to the RECC](#) that it--

"the Committee is supportive of aquaculture, but further development and expansion must be on the basis of a precautionary approach and must be based on resolving the environmental problems. The status quo is not an option."
4. The RECC made a wide range of recommendations in its inquiry report, covering issues such as the interaction between wild and farmed salmon; the health and welfare of farmed salmon; the location of fish farms; and the regulation and consent mechanisms which apply to the farmed salmon industry.
5. The RECC received two responses to its report, from [the Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy](#) and [the Scottish Environment Protection Agency](#).
6. Subsequently, the Committee took evidence from two stakeholder panels in [November 2020](#) and from the Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy and Tourism in [December 2020](#) to explore what progress had been made in the intervening two years in implementing the Committee's recommendations.

7. The [RECC's Session 5 legacy report](#) expressed disappointment in what it considered to be a lack of progress in implementing its salmon farming inquiry recommendations in the two years since its report had been published. The Committee concluded—

“there is still a great deal of work to be done to address the issues raised during its inquiry and suggests that its successor/s may wish to consider following up on these matters during Session 6 and undertaking continued scrutiny of the regulation, performance and sustainability of Scotland’s aquaculture sector.”

Bute House agreement

8. The Scottish Government and Scottish Green Party [shared policy programme](#) first published on 20 August 2021 stated the following:

“We agree with the Scottish Parliament’s Rural Economy and Connectivity and Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committees that the status quo of aquaculture regulation is not an option. We will:

- **reform the regulatory and planning framework**, starting with an independent review to consider the effectiveness and efficiency of the current regime and make recommendations for further work by the end of 2021.
- develop a **vision and strategy for sustainable aquaculture** that places an enhanced emphasis on environmental protection and community benefits.
- begin an **immediate programme of work to better protect wildlife and the environment**, including a response to the Salmon Interactions Working Group in September 2021, consultation on a spatially adaptive sea lice risk assessment framework for fish farms by the end of the year, and strengthened controls on sea lice, wrasse and fish escapes in the course of 2021/22.
- explore how best to **ensure that fish farming contributes more to support communities** and recreational fisheries, to promote innovation and to support services such as fish health and welfare inspections and monitoring.”

Griggs Review

9. [In August 2021, Professor Russel Griggs was tasked by the Scottish Government to deliver a first phase of a review](#) into the regulation of aquaculture. [Prof Griggs reported his findings in February 2022](#). [The Scottish Government welcomed the findings](#) but is yet to respond in detail to the recommendations. However, the Cabinet Secretary [wrote](#) to the Committee on 3 May 2022 to announce phase 2 of the review. In her letter, the Cabinet Secretary stated that —

“In summary, I have launched and will lead a new Ministerial Aquaculture Strategy Forum, which will oversee implementation of Professor Griggs recommendations and development of the new vision for sustainable aquaculture. I have asked my officials to form a consenting task group to make rapid progress on streamlining the aquaculture consenting system, including making an immediate change to the marine licence validity period from 6 to 25 years to align it with Crown Estate Scotland sea bed lease cycles. In response to Griggs’ references to the use of science and evidence in the consenting process, I have today asked the Scottish Science Advisory Council to give consideration to the relevant recommendations.”

10. The Committee held an evidence session with Professor Griggs on [22 June 2022](#). At that meeting, the Committee discussed key recommendations included in his report including the introduction of—

- different regulatory solutions for finfish, shellfish, and seaweed;
- a single website and body that provides information about starting an aquaculture business and regulations;
- a new single consent document should be created that involves all parties in the application process; and
- a central science and evidence base should be created to help make effective decisions within the regulatory framework.

Scottish Government update

11. Ahead of this meeting, the [Committee asked for a written update to the Scottish Government's progress in implementing the recommendations made by the RECC and Professor Griggs review](#).

12. The Scottish Government's response details a number of developments in relation to aquaculture policy, including—

- Sea lice monitoring and intervention levels were first introduced in 2016 at 3 and 8 sea lice per fish respectively, reduced to 2 and 6 sea lice per fish in 2018, and there was a commitment to reduce them further to an average of 2 and 4 sea lice per fish respectively, unless there is 'compelling evidence to the contrary'. The commitment to reducing sea lice monitoring and intervention levels will not be pursued at this time due to limited availability of medicines, veterinary implications, and new sea lice risk framework.
- The Scottish Aquaculture Council has been established to deliver the next steps of the regulatory review and ensure twin-track progress across all government commitments relevant to aquaculture.
- A new Consenting Task Group has been formed to identify, pilot and review new measures to achieve improvements in aquaculture consenting processes.
- The Scottish Science Advisory Council has published a [report](#) on the use of science and evidence in aquaculture consenting.
- The Scottish Government plans to publish its Vision for Sustainable Aquaculture soon and has begun a consultation on the implementation and business impact of the new Environmental Quality Standard for emamectin benzoate.
- Crown Estate Scotland has conducted a thorough review and changes to the aquaculture seabed lease fees will be made this year. For salmon farming, the changes will be phased in, starting with all existing and new lease agreements being charged at a rate of 1% notional turnover. From January 2026, a rate of 1.5% will be implemented. As a result, the contribution from aquaculture will increase from around £5m to £10m this year. Additionally, all net revenues from Scottish Crown Estate marine assets within 12 nautical miles will be allocated to coastal local authorities for community benefit.

13. The Scottish Government's response also includes an annexe which details progress made to address the recommendations made by the RECC in 2018 following its inquiry into Salmon Farming in Scotland.

**Rural Affairs and Islands Committee clerks
May 2023**