

NATIONAL TRUST FOR SCOTLAND MEDIA RELEASE

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Scotland's leading conservation charity wades into fish farming debate

The National Trust for Scotland has called on the country's fish farming sector to fix its pollution problems before contemplating further expansion.

The 360,000-member Trust has added its voice to those of other NGOs, naturalists, anglers, politicians and thousands of members of the public in calling on the industry to clean up its act.

The Trust's experts say that Scotland has the potential to support a successful aquaculture sector, but only if we effectively manage issues of effluent discharge, disease, and chemical pollution.

The National Trust for Scotland is calling for a moratorium on the expansion of marine fish farming in Scotland until existing environmental problems are addressed.

As a country, our food and drink products trade on associations with a pristine and beautiful natural environment, and we can't risk undermining this for short-term gain.

Salmon farming is not effectively managing environmental impacts, and plans to double production, or introduce fishfarms to new areas, must be put on hold until solutions are found.

The Trust supports the development of a sustainable aquaculture sector, one which respects the environment in which it operates. Scottish food and drink products trade at a premium internationally, drawing on perceptions that they come from a pristine environment.

Farmed salmon is the number one food export for the UK, sold in 60 countries and with an estimated value of £579.2m (2016).

Scottish farmed salmon is produced in open cages, anchored in coastal areas of the west coast and the northern isles. There is currently a moratorium on fish farming on the north and east coasts to protect salmon rivers there. The particular problems for the Scottish industry are the prevalence of sea lice, which have a damaging effect on farmed fish, but also on wild salmon and sea trout.

The Trust's Senior Nature Conservation Advisor, Dr Richard Luxmoore, commented:

"The Scottish industry last year lost more than a million fish to sea lice infestations. The impacts on wild fish are harder to measure, but they add to other factors leading to the collapse of wild salmon and sea trout stocks, for instance on the River Awe.

"Remarkably, there is no single government body with responsibility for the health of our wild fish."

The chemical treatments used to tackle these infestations can cause damage to wild species, including crab, lobster and langoustine, themselves economically important.

Luxmoore added:

"These problems have been exacerbated by a failure to meet even current standards. The aquaculture sector was identified by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency as one of the least compliant sectors, with 20% of fish farms not meeting existing standards in 2015.

A further problem is the waste food and untreated faeces discharged from fish farms - "A moderately large fish farm will dump the same amount of sewage as a town twice the size of Oban", says Dr Luxmoore, "and, unlike human sewage, it is entirely untreated".

Luxmoore echoes the findings of the Scottish Parliament's Environment Committee:

"The all-party ECCLR Committee of the Scottish Parliament unanimously agreed their report in March of this year and concluded that the current consenting and regulatory framework is inadequate to address the environmental issues.

“They were not convinced the sector is being regulated effectively, and made it clear that this needs to be addressed urgently because further expansion must be on an environmentally sustainable basis.

“They also said that if the current issues are not addressed this expansion will be unsustainable and may cause irrecoverable damage to the environment, concluding ‘the status quo is not an option’.

“Ambitious proposals to double production and to expand fish farming into new areas of Scotland’s seas cannot be supported until we are confident we can manage these environmental challenges”.

The Trust is therefore calling on plans for expanding production to be put on hold until these problems are addressed.

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The National Trust for Scotland is the charity that celebrates and protects Scotland’s heritage. It relies on the support of its members and donors to carry out its important work of caring for the natural and built heritage of Scotland for everyone to enjoy.

Every day, the hundreds of thousands of members, donors, volunteers and staff at the charity help to protect Scotland’s natural and national treasures for us all to enjoy. From coastlines to castles, art to architecture, wildlife to wildernesses, we do what we do... for the *love* of Scotland. Join us at www.nts.org.uk/love

