



Salmon and Trout Conservation's policy on salmon farming

Open-net salmon farming in Scotland, as currently practised, must end as soon as possible

Salmon & Trout Conservation has been engaged with the efforts to deal with the harm caused to wild salmon and sea trout populations by open-net salmon farming in Scotland for over two decades.

In the early 2010s, S&TC was closely involved in mediated negotiations with the industry, hosted by the Scottish Government, to try to find a way forward to protect wild salmon and sea trout.

S&TC contributed to the Scottish Parliamentary efforts to increase that protection in the run up to the Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2013, but despite promises from the Scottish Government, protection for wild salmonids in the aquaculture zone of Scotland did not improve.

In 2016, S&TC launched its Parliamentary Petition (PE01598: Protecting wild salmonids from sea lice from Scottish salmon farms) at Holyrood. The Petition was examined by the Petitions Committee of MSPs and led in turn to two comprehensive enquiries by the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee and then by the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee, both of which reported in 2018.

Both Committees concluded that regulation of Scottish salmon farming was not delivering protection for the environment, that the status quo is not an option and that environmental issues had to be dealt with before there should be any expansion of the industry.

Since publication of those two reports, there has been considerable further expansion of the industry (in excess of 50,000 additional biomass capacity) and we are still waiting for any substantive change in the sea lochs of Scotland to deal with the impacts of sea lice, disease and escapes on wild salmon and sea trout.

That is simply unacceptable and illustrates clearly to us that Scottish Government has no real will or intention to rein in the damage caused by Scottish salmon farming.

In July 2021, with the appointment of Professor Russel Griggs to undertake the first part of yet a further review of the regulatory processes involved in salmon farming in Scotland, it has become very clear that the Scottish Government will not deal with what the ECCLR and REC Committees identified as serious issues in 2018 within any reasonable timescale. The review is not scheduled to be completed until late 2023.

In the Cabinet Secretary's letter to Professor Griggs of 30th July, she made it plain that "as a starting point, it is clear we need a strategic analysis of the issues that need fixing based on a good understanding of work to date, sound evidence on the current workings of the system and an accurate appraisal of what people actually think about its operation". It is as if the Scottish Government has completely missed the warnings given by the two Parliamentary Committees in 2018.

In October of this year, Scottish Government also endorsed the fundamentally inadequate [Salmon Interactions Working Group recommendations](#) adopting all the SIWG's recommendations. In so doing

it is ever clearer that SG is not serious about implementing measures that will effectively address the negative impact of salmon farm-derived sea lice on wild salmon and sea trout.

What SIWG proposed simply will not work. S&TCS published a comprehensive review of the SIWG report, and why its recommendations fell well short of what is required, in May 2020. [Read our review here.](#)

Overall, Scottish Government has made it crystal clear that it intends to allow and encourage the industry to expand – this will be irrespective of the harm that will be caused to wild salmonids. Nor is there any intention to force the industry to deal with the existing negative impacts of open-net salmon farming.

Therefore, in the face of Scottish Government actions, S&TC considers that open-net salmon farming in Scotland, as currently practised, **must now end as soon as possible.**

To be clear, S&TC will now oppose both the continued operation of all existing open-net farms, as well as any proposed expansion of those existing farms or the establishment of any new farms.

All open-net farms should be closed as soon as possible, and the industry moved into full closed containment, where a physical and biological separation is maintained between farmed and wild fish and the wider coastal environment.

S&TC now sees that as the only practical way to protect wild salmon and sea trout in Scotland given the Scottish Government's current indifferent position, under which it pays no more than token lip-service to addressing the serious environmental issues associated with open-net salmon farming. In consequence, S&TC recommends strongly that no-one should buy, consume, sell or promote in any way any Scottish farmed salmon products made with farmed salmon from open-net farms.

[Read our response to the SIWG report is here.](#)

[Read further analysis/commentary here.](#)