

Ministear airson na h-Àrainneachd agus Atharrachadh Aimsir
Minister for Environment and Climate Change
Paul Wheelhouse BPA/MSP

F/T: 0845 774 1741
E: scottish.ministers@scotland.gsi.gov.uk



Rob Gibson MSP
Convener
Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP



E-mail: racce.committee@scottish.parliament.uk

17 December 2013

Dear Rob

Thank you for your letter of 27 November 2013 seeking an update on sea lice issues.

As you rightly point out the issue of reporting sea lice data was discussed at length during the progress of the Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2013 through Scottish Parliament.

The Scottish Government received a commitment from the Scottish Salmon Producers' Organisation (SSPO) for enhanced voluntary reporting of sea lice data for 30 areas based on recognised wild fish catchments. There have now been three quarterly reports published by the SSPO. Scottish Government supports these voluntary Management Reports and regards them as balanced, proportionate and helpful as regards public transparency. In addition, the SSPO agreed that they would provide Marine Scotland Science with access to sea lice information at farm management area level to support defined research projects.

The voluntary sea lice public reporting approach should be seen as part of an overall package that allows us to ensure the environmental sustainability of fish farms. It is not the means by which compliance is judged, rather, there is a robust regulatory system - which the Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2013 enhances - overseen by the fish health inspectorate, SEPA and others. The requirement for all operators to enter into Farm Management Agreements or Statements set out arrangements for managing fish health and parasites. In addition, fish health inspectors may access farm-level data and inspect fish cages during their inspections. Over time the voluntary reporting will begin to indicate trends and will provide a mechanism that facilitates improved performance where report outputs can be fed into the process of reviewing farm management agreements and statements.

Scotland's aquaculture stocks are internationally recognised as having a high health status, maintained by a regular inspection programme that includes the evaluation of mortality and sea lice numbers by Marine Scotland's Fish Health Inspectorate. The Inspectorate maintains a programme of basic and enhanced inspections with respect to sea lice. Where it is considered that the health of the farmed fish and/or their welfare has been compromised

Taigh Naomh Anndrais, Rathad Regent, Dùn Èideann EH1 3DG
St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG
www.scotland.gov.uk



appropriate action will be taken, that may include the requirement to withdraw the stocks affected.

Where elevated sea lice levels have been reported operators have been working towards enhancing their on-farm sea lice management in several ways, including: the revision of stocking strategies to synchronise production and fallowing periods; the use of larger pens facilitating increased synchronicity of on-farm treatment; the use of cleanerfish to act as biological controls for sea lice, and independent veterinarian assessment of measures in place to effectively manage sea lice on-farm.

As I said at Committee I am committed to keep the new publication arrangements under review, in the current session of Parliament, and retain powers to legislate on data release if these voluntary arrangements are not operating as expected.

Scottish Government is working with Scotland's Atlantic salmon farming industry on a strategic programme of research that includes a study to explore any impacts of sea lice from fish farming in Scotland. Marine Scotland also directly carry-out and fund work towards developing a better understanding of the potential impacts of sea lice that includes sweep netting surveys of sea trout, for levels of sea lice, and projects to better evaluate management options as part of its ongoing day-to-day work. Scottish Government consider carefully all research on the impact of sea lice on wild salmon in the wider marine environment and will also continue to consider any evidence of an impact on wild fish stocks from fish farms.

With respect to increased access to aquaculture information Scotland now has an aquaculture database <http://aquaculture.scotland.gov.uk>. This web-based resource provides detailed information on fish farms from datasets held by Marine Scotland, the Food Standards Agency (Scotland), The Crown Estate and SEPA. Also, Marine Scotland's Fish Health Inspectorate has a new Publication Plan which will publish the latest routine FHI fish farm Inspection reports on a quarterly basis. This new and proactive publication approach, particularly when considered alongside the recent launch of the Aquaculture Website, further demonstrates a continued move towards openness and transparency which should be seen as a further positive step forward.

In relation to your comments made on the "tit-for tat" exchanges between the fish farming and wild salmon industries I have established an Interactions Working Group that sits, as one of seven groups, within the Ministerial Group for Sustainable Aquaculture (MGSA). The Interactions group has seen positive engagement between both the farmed and wild fisheries interests.

I hope this clarifies the progress already made and the work being undertaken by the Scottish Government on sea lice issues that were raised during the Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2013's Parliamentary consideration.

I am happy to discuss further.

Kindest regards



PAUL WHEELHOUSE

Taigh Naomh Anndrais, Rathad Regent, Dùn Èideann EH1 3DG
St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG
www.scotland.gov.uk

