



News Release

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S&TCS Campaign and Petition leads to Parliamentary Inquiry into Scottish salmon farming

MSPs to investigate environmental impacts of fish farms

A formal Petition, lodged in the Scottish Parliament in February 2016 by Salmon & Trout Conservation Scotland, seeking protection for wild salmonids from sea lice from Scottish salmon farms, has resulted in MSPs launching an Inquiry into the salmon farming industry in Scotland.

The Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee of MSPs agreed at Holyrood this week to conduct a full-blown Inquiry into salmon farming in Scotland and the issues raised in S&TCS' Petition.

Guy Linley-Adams, for S&TCS, said:

"We are delighted that MSPs of all parties have shown such concern and interest and we thank them for launching this Inquiry. This will enable S&TCS to bring all MSPs attention to what they can do to protect Scotland's iconic wild salmon and sea trout, and the wider Scottish environment, from the damage it is currently suffering as a result of salmon farming in marine open cages.

"This is a vindication of what S&TCS has been saying for some years. It hasn't always been a very popular message in some quarters, but the message has now got through and MSPs have taken the first steps towards a solution".

S&TCS' Aquaculture Campaign's 2016 Petition recommends that the Scottish Parliament should seek to amend the Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2007 to give Scottish Ministers a statutory duty to inspect farms and enforce sea lice control on salmon farms. This is for the express purpose of protecting wild salmonid fish from juvenile sea lice infestation from marine cage fish farms, and statutory powers to order immediate culls of any marine cage fish farm where average adult female sea lice numbers of farmed fish remain persistently above Code of Good Practice thresholds.

Over the medium term, S&TCS argues that those farms consistently failing to control sea lice should be closed or relocated to move the worst performing farms away from salmonid rivers and migration routes.

Finally, S&TCS supports a renewed focus on moving to full closed containment of farmed salmon production in Scotland, with complete 'biological separation' of wild and farmed fish.

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For further information on this press release, please contact: Guy Linley-Adams on 01432-379093 or email: guy@linley-adams.co.uk Issued on behalf of Salmon and Trout Conservation Scotland.

Notes for editors

1) **Salmon & Trout Conservation UK (S&TC UK)** was established as the Salmon & Trout Association (S&TA) in 1903 to address the damage done to our rivers by the polluting effects of the Industrial Revolution. Since then, S&TC UK has worked to protect fisheries, fish stocks and the wider aquatic environment for the public benefit. S&TC UK has charitable status in both England and Scotland (as S&TCS) and its charitable objectives empower it to address all issues affecting fish and the aquatic environment, supported by robust evidence from its scientific network, and to take the widest possible remit in protecting salmonid fish stocks and the aquatic environment upon which they depend. www.salmon-trout.org www.salmon-troutscotland.org

2) Scottish Government action required

Fisheries scientists – including the Scottish Government’s own scientists - are firm in their conclusions that sea lice produced on fish-farms harm wild salmon and sea trout, both at an individual and at a population level.

However, S&TCS believes that these threats are not being addressed by effective regulation and control of sea lice numbers on fish-farms in Scotland, which are essential to protect wild fish populations, many already significantly reduced.

In 2016, the S&TCS raised a formal Petition to the Scottish Parliament, which seeks to change the law, firstly to require immediate culls or harvesting of farmed where sea lice numbers have effectively gone out of control and secondly to give fish farm inspectors the legal duty to control sea lice on fish farms, expressly to protect wild fish populations from juvenile sea lice infestation from marine cage fish farms.

The Petition has been considered by the Scottish Parliament’s Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee.

3) Just what is the problem with sea lice?

Adult wild salmon are perfectly adapted to coping with a few sea lice. Background levels of these parasites occur naturally in the sea. However the advent of salmon farming, particularly in fjordic or largely enclosed sea lochs, has led to a fundamental

change in the density and occurrence of sea lice in parts of the coastal waters of the west Highlands and Islands.

Even one or two mature female sea lice per fish within a set of cages housing hundreds of thousands of farmed salmon amounts to a very large breeding reservoir producing huge numbers of mobile juvenile sea lice that move out into the local marine environment. The consequences for wild salmon and sea trout smolts, the metamorphosing fragile skin of which is not adapted to cope with more than the odd louse, as they migrate from local rivers to sea can be devastating.

Carrying an unnaturally high burden of sea lice is known to compromise severely the survival of juvenile migratory salmonids. Lice feed by grazing on the surface of the fish and eating the mucous and skin. Large numbers of lice soon cause the loss of fins, severe scarring, secondary infections and, in time, death. Quite literally, the fish are eaten alive. Badly infested salmon smolts disappear out to sea, never to be seen again. In contrast afflicted sea trout smolts remain within the locality and they, together with the impact of the deadly burdens they carry, are more easily monitored through sweep net operations.

The 2016 paper *Aquaculture and environmental drivers of salmon lice infestation and body condition in sea trout* (Shephard et al (2016) *Aquaculture Environment Interactions*) analysed a 25 yr dataset of lice counts from >20 000 sea trout sampled from 94 separate river and lake systems in Ireland and Scotland at varying distances from marine salmon farms and concluded that “*sea trout captured closer to salmon farms had significantly higher levels of lice infestation, and that this effect was exacerbated in warmer years. Sea trout sampled closer to salmon farms also had significantly reduced weight at length (impaired condition), with the strongest impact in dry years*”.

See <http://www.int-res.com/articles/aei2016/8/q008p597.pdf>