

Salmon farming in Scotland

Letter from John Gray, 3 June 2024

Dear Committee Member,

My attention has been drawn to the imminent inquiry by the Rural Affairs & Islands Committee, of which I understand you to be a member, set up to review the progress of earlier recommendations to regulate the Scottish salmon farming industry, with a view to allowing the sustainable growth of this, to date, extremely unwholesome, environmentally damaging and virtually uncontrolled industry.

It seems to me that little, if any, progress has been made in this regard in recent years, despite clear and incontrovertible evidence of the adverse impacts of the industry, and would urge you to take a balanced view of the industry as it operates today, weighing the severe environmental impacts of seabed pollution and its impact on marine life and sea lice infestation (causing horrendous injury and death not only to the caged salmon but also to wild populations of sea trout and salmon, now classified as an endangered species, not least as a result of the catastrophic damage caused directly by the salmon farms), against the potential, if often overstated, economic benefits to highland and island communities of the growth in salmon farming. It should be remembered that many traditional jobs in these remote areas, in earlier times associated with the thriving salmon and sea trout sport fishing sector, have been lost directly as a result of the loss of game fish stocks on the west coast through sea lice infestation. The earlier inquiry was well informed on such losses, both economically and environmentally.

Despite the challenges, I believe that it may be possible, through strict and sensible regulation, combined perhaps with financial incentives, to steer the industry towards a sustainable, more environmentally friendly future, where the salmon farmers might co-exist with a thriving Scottish wild life and marine environment while, at the same time, producing a healthy, disease-free product.

The most promising solution that I have seen to date is to isolate the farmed fish from the wild environment, protecting the wild salmon and sea trout from the disease and sea lice bred in the salmon cages. One excellent example is to be found in the recent development of on-land salmon farming by the Icelandic firm Silverscale. See <https://silverscalefish.com/>

Such developments should be studied closely as they overcome many of the objections to salmon farming as currently run in Scotland. Sea lice infestation and seabed pollution, two of the major environmental hazards of Scottish salmon farming, would be immediately eliminated and a much healthier and disease free product produced.

I have not, and would not dream of consuming the thoroughly distasteful and environmentally damaging product produced by Scottish salmon farms. However I recently bought some from Silverscale with a clear conscience, and it was delicious.

Scottish salmon farms, as currently run, cannot be allowed to continue to operate, far less to grow, in our once pristine Scottish marine environment.

Yours sincerely,
John Gray