

Salmon farming in Scotland

Letter from Corin Smith, Wild Rise Company, 17 October 2024

Dear Committee Members,

With reference to a question from Arianne Burgess to Ben Hadfield, COO MOWI, during the committee hearing on Wed 2 Oct, there is considerable concern that the issue was misrepresented and diminished in a way that is not supported by the known facts and to such a degree that it could be considered that the committee may have been misled. Three directly affected parties wish to place, on the record, the facts associated with this incident.

Arianne Burgess asked Ben Hadfield whether he wished to offer some comment concerning an incident where it was reported MOWI had lied to residents affected by a plan to install an automated feedbarge at the Wester Ross/MOWI Corry salmon feedlot in Loch Broom.

Ben Hadfield sought to characterise this as a "misunderstanding". I, along with two others, who have direct knowledge of the circumstances wish to make it clear in unequivocal terms and with full force of the meaning of the words, that MOWI/Wester Ross salmon farming company did in full knowledge and with deliberate intent lie to residents. It is our opinion that this was done to manipulate residents in such a way that they would not oppose conversion of the Corry site infrastructure. Conversion that was necessary to ultimately enable MOWI to expand and automate operations at the site, an intention that was not disclosed and MOWI were likely to know would have resulted in significant opposition had they disclosed this when the first round of changes were proposed.

With regards to the facts of the situation, these were reported by the Ferret, published May 26, 2024 ["Salmon firm accused of misleading locals over fish farm plans in highland beauty spot"](#)

Lesley Spencely and Ailsa McLellan, residents living within a few hundred meters of the feedlot, went on the record. Below are the relevant paragraphs from the Ferret article.

"Two locals who had a private meeting with the firm last June, and attended the public meeting in Ullapool, claim they were misled prior to that event. Lesley Spenceley who stays in a cottage at Lochside, on the shore of Loch Broom, told The Ferret: "We had no issues with Wester Ross Fisheries at all previously. The fish farm has been right outside our house since 1977 – but we've had increasing problems since Mowi took over in the last two years. We're about 350 metres from it, so very close – so close that when atmospheric conditions are right we can actually hear the guys on the fish farm talking."

"There's noise from diesel compressors and generators mounted on the farm 24/7 in the summer, which is used to oxygenate the water for the fish, and they are

incredibly noisy.”

There was a meeting with the firm at Spenceley’s home on 27 June 2023 to discuss the problems. “It was a meeting about the 24/7 operating day-time noise from the fish farm. It was stated categorically at that meeting that there would be no feed barge at this farm. One of the management sat at my dining table and looked us in the eye and said, ‘there will be no feed barge. We have no plans for a feed barge.’

“At the meeting a couple of weeks ago they actually came out and said it was always our intention to have one – they blatantly lied. The level of public distrust in them in this area is huge. You could really feel that palpably from the meeting. People just did not believe a word they were saying.”

Ailsa McLellan, a marine scientist who previously worked for the fish farming industry, also stays in Lochside, at Loch Broom. She attended the meeting with the firm in June at Spenceley’s home and backed her claims. “The fish farm is in front of my house. We were 100 per cent misled – it was a downright lie.”

Additionally, at a MOWI public event held in Ullapool 27 March 2024 I questioned MOWI’s Environmental Manager and Regional Director about the company’s planning applications. There is a recording of the exchange which can be viewed [HERE \(click to view video\)](#) @ 13mins 20secs

Transcript Corin Smith and MOWI Regional Director

Corin Smith, who said: “You always knew that when you were putting those pens in that you were going to bring a large new feed barge on site as well, at that point when you made that application . Did you or did you not know that you were going to bring a large feed barge, as an organisation at that point?”

The MOWI/Wester Ross employee replied: “Yes, we did.”

Smith said: “You did. But you didn’t tell the community then.”

The employee said: “Yeah but we weren’t actually obliged to tell you”

The committee must not equivocate on its interpretation of these events. The facts are clear and simple. MOWI/Wester Ross deliberately misled residents. The reason for doing so would appear to be to enable a policy of development by stealth. It was not in any way a "misunderstanding".

I have copied Maree Todd, the local MSP, and Councillor Liz Kraft, both of whom were involved in correspondence with MOWI/Wester Ross and were apparently asked by the salmon farming company to assist with the situation and went on to try to organise meetings on their behalf. They may provide further information.

Yours sincerely,

Corin Smith