

Rural Affairs and Islands Committee
Wednesday 5 June 2024
16th Meeting, 2024 (Session 6)

Follow-up inquiry into salmon farming in Scotland

Introduction

1. The Rural Affairs and Islands Committee agreed to undertake a follow-up inquiry into the implementation of recommendations on salmon farming in Scotland set out by Session 5 Rural Economy and Connectivity (REC) Committee.

Background

Committee work on salmon farming in Session 5

2. In Session 5, the REC Committee undertook an inquiry which sought to assess the “state of the salmon farming industry in Scotland, identify opportunities for its future development and explore how the various fish health and environmental challenges it currently faces can be addressed”.
3. The Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (ECCLR) Committee concurrently carried out work on the environmental impacts of salmon farming. The ECCLR Committee set out its [findings in a letter to the REC Committee](#) to inform its inquiry. The REC Committee published [its report in November 2018](#). It noted that:

“the Committee is supportive of aquaculture, but further development and expansion must be on the basis of a precautionary approach and must be based on resolving the environmental problems. The status quo is not an option.”
4. The REC Committee made a wide range of recommendations about the state of salmon farming and the sector in its inquiry report. The REC Committee received two responses to its report, from the then [Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy](#) and the [Scottish Environment Protection Agency](#).
5. The REC Committee took evidence on the implementation of its recommendations at its meetings on [18 November 2020](#) and [2 December 2020](#).
6. In its Session 5 [legacy report](#) the REC Committee expressed disappointment in what it considered to be a lack of progress in implementing its salmon farming inquiry recommendations since its report had been published. It suggested “that its successors may wish to consider following up on these matters during Session 6 and undertaking continued scrutiny of the regulation, performance and sustainability of Scotland’s aquaculture sector”.

Previous work by the RAI Committee

7. Previously, the Committee has taken evidence from Professor Russel Griggs on his [independent review of aquaculture](#) regulation at its meeting on 22 June 2022. [Read Official Report for the meeting.](#)
8. In addition, the Committee held an evidence session with the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands on 10 May 2023 which focused on the Scottish Government's progress in responding to the recommendations in the RECC report and the Griggs review. [Read the Official Report for the meeting.](#)

Remit and timetable for the inquiry

9. This will be a focused inquiry which does not aim to repeat the work of the REC Committee in exploring the various issues around salmon farming in Scotland. Instead, the remit of this inquiry is to 'follow up' on themes drawn out in that Committee's wide-ranging inquiry to ascertain what progress the Scottish Government has made in enacting the opportunities identified by that Committee for improvements to the salmon industry.
10. This inquiry will look at the report's recommendations and assess where progress has been made across themes such as:
 - economic and social benefit
 - environmental impacts and regulatory reform
 - farmed salmon health and welfare
 - interactions with wild salmon

Evidence session on 5 June 2024

11. At its meeting on 5 June 2024, the Committee will commence its inquiry work by taking evidence from environmental non-governmental organisations, followed by academics and scientists from the aquaculture sector.
12. The rationale for these panels is to help the Committee identify key issues related to progress on the implementation of the RECC report for further discussion throughout its future evidence sessions.

Next steps

13. Following this meeting, the Committee will continue to hold evidence sessions throughout June. The Committee has agreed to hear from:

12 June

- Fish Health Inspectorate

19 June

- Scottish Science Advisory Council
- Scottish Environmental Protection Agency

26 June

- John Goodlad, Chair of the Salmon Interaction Working Group
- Fisheries Management Scotland

2 October

- Representatives of the Scottish salmon farming industry

9 October

- The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands

14. In September, the Committee will undertake a fact-finding visit to Oban to meet with a range of local stakeholders and gain a first-hand account of the operation of salmon farming and its impact on local communities. Following the conclusion of evidence taking, the Committee will then publish a short report setting out its inquiry findings.

Clerks to the Committee

May 2024