



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Edward Mountain MSP

Member of the Scottish Parliament for Highlands and Islands Region

Finlay Carson MSP  
Convener  
Rural Affairs and Islands Committee  
Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh  
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*Dear Convener,*

Firstly, I would like to thank the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee for making me welcome at their meetings when they reviewed the Rural Economy and Connectivity (REC) Committee's report into Salmon Farming in Scotland. As the Convener of that Committee, it is good to see our work being reviewed and followed up. I am sure that the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (ECCLR) Committee whose report stated when it came to aquaculture, that the 'status quo' was not acceptable, would also be pleased this matter has not been dropped.

As I made clear at all the Parliamentary meetings relating to this subject area, I have been involved in the management of wild salmon for over 40 years, not only as a proprietor of a wild fishery but also for a time as a professional advisor on behalf of owners. My interest in salmon extends beyond catching them, it extends into all aspects of their life cycle and the environment they live and mature in. What is clear to me is that all those that manage an environment for a species, whether wild or farmed, have a duty to do so in such a way that they are good neighbours to all flora and fauna.

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During the REC Committee inquiry, I defended salmon farming. I did this as I felt it was not only an important part of Scotland's export industry, but because it provided rural jobs especially in the Highlands. I concluded that if the industry made good on their promises to the Committee, then they could become the 'good neighbour' that they clearly at that stage were not. I was also swayed by the evidence we heard that things would improve with mortality dropping back to around the 7% mark, which is where it was in 2009/10.

It is however now clear that those industry assurances have not been delivered as promised. Indeed, mortality has increased from about 15% in 2018 to even higher levels. The result is that now about 25% of all fish going to sea die before they can be harvested and that many fish are harvested early to prevent further deaths.

There are many reasons quoted for this mortality including; increased sea temperatures, rising numbers of jellyfish and resistance to medication, to mention but three. What is clear is that there are significant issues that the industry cannot currently resolve. In the period 2017-2021 antibiotic use increased by 168% although recent figures suggest that this is reducing.

For all the above reasons, I don't believe that the industry is addressing, either fast or efficiently enough, the many health issues that they face. The challenges appear to be both too big and constantly developing. I would acknowledge that this failure to resolve these problems is despite significant financial investment by the industry.

I believe that these issues can no longer be ignored. Furthermore, it is clear to me that if salmon farming is to have the future that we all want, then it is right that we ask them to pause any expansion, regroup and address the issues. As a critical friend, by calling for this, I think that we will ensure the future of this industry.





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For these reasons I feel compelled to ask the Committee to consider recommending a moratorium on the expansion of salmon farming until they are satisfied that the industry is capable of addressing the 25% mortality that is now commonplace. As the climate gets warmer, the issues the industry face will sadly only get worse, and this alone makes the status quo even more unacceptable than it was in 2018.

With kind regards,

Edward Mountain MSP  
Highlands and Islands Region

