

## Fisheries Management Scotland

### Fish Farming Committee Meeting Minutes

**Date: 09 November 2021**

### **By Videoconference**

#### **Present**

Alan Wells (FMS) (Chair)	Alasdair Laing (Findhorn)
Lucy Ballantyne (Lochaber)	Shona Marshall (West Sutherland)
Roger Brook (Argyll)	Charlotte Middleton (FMS)
Richard Davies (Outer Hebrides)	Isabel Moore (Skye)
Paul Hopper (Outer Hebrides)	Keith Williams (Kyle of Sutherland)
Alan Kettle-White (Argyll)	Bob Younger (Fish Legal)

#### **Apologies**

Stuart Brabbs, Jon Gibb, Peter Jarosz, Jason Laing, Malcolm MaCormick, Rob Whitson, Bill Whyte, Willie Yeomans.

#### **1. Welcome and Introductions**

AW welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted the apologies.

#### **2. Local updates**

Each area provided a short update on issues arising locally. These included:

- Argyll  
Sea lice infestation pressure was variable this year, with concerning infestations recorded on wild fish in some areas. It was noted that some farms have trialled snorkel nets, but there was little evidence that sea lice performance had improved as a result. Lice levels on both wild and farmed fish in Loch Etive this year were of significant concern and the Fish Health Inspectorate (FHI) was contacted. Loch Long Salmon have now submitted their full planning application, and other applications for Scottish Sea Farms in outer Loch Linnhe remain open.
- Lochaber  
This year's monitoring revealed significant lice burdens on wild sea trout, particularly in Loch Linnhe. The Trust has met with local fish farm operators to understand the issues and discuss preventative actions for the next production cycle. The use of a coastal fyke net has proven to be successful as a sampling method, with logistical support from local fish farm operators.
- Western Isles  
Monitoring effort through sweep netting was curtailed due to high water temperatures and associated concerns for fish welfare. There have also been concerns regarding illegal activity during the COVID-19 lockdowns, with large numbers of gill net marked fish. A coastal fyke net

was trialled this year and was successful as a mechanism for sampling wild fish. The fyke net will be deployed next year to run throughout the season.

- Skye

There have been some difficulties at local farms this year with Amoebic Gill Disease, which has been associated with high lice levels on farms. High lice levels were also detected on wild sea trout. The Trust will trial a coastal fyke net in 2022. It was also noted that a recent application for a new farm by Organic Sea Harvest was dismissed at appeal.

- Kyle of Sutherland

Discussions with Highland Council continue with regards to the Environmental Management Plan (EMP) required for the Migdale farm in Loch Shin. The recently published report on the influence of farmed salmon escapes on the genetic integrity of wild Atlantic salmon populations by Marine Scotland was relevant to these EMP discussions. The report was discussed in more detail in agenda item 9.

- West Sutherland

Some very high lice levels in Clashnessie Bay were discussed. The situation occurred as a result of Pancreatic Disease on farmed fish this year. A coastal fyke net was trialled this year but the location suggested by NatureScot was unsuitable and the net will be moved to an alternative location next year.

- All

It was noted that the industry are moving to replace pens with larger, 160m<sup>2</sup> pens across most companies. Additionally, an increase in planning applications both for new farms and amendments to existing farms is likely to increase the workload for any Trusts who wish to engage in monitoring impacts of sea lice and escapes, and there was discussion around the capacity of the sector to engage in this work with a view to protecting wild salmonids.

**ACTION:** CM to follow up with the Trusts on further coordinating the approach to wild fish monitoring.

**ACTION:** CM to pull together the 2021 sweep netting data and provide overview.

**ACTION:** CM to continue to engage with the SSPO on accessing historic and current data on the numbers of fish on farm sites.

### **3. West Coast Tracking Project**

There was a discussion about ensuring that the Trusts have suitable capacity to engage in the West Coast Tracking Project and ensure that monitoring work to understand sea lice infestation levels during the wild smolt run, are available. In planning for the second year of the West Coast Tracking Project, some Trusts are investigating the potential for some additional support for the tagging work involved where possible.

### **4. Salmon Interactions Working Group Response & Aquaculture Review**

The Scottish Government published their response to the Salmon Interactions Working Group Recommendations on 5<sup>th</sup> October 2021. The report identifies that “SEPA will become the lead body responsible for managing the risk to wild salmonids” within the reformed regulatory system.

Fisheries Management Scotland are urging the Scottish Government to implement these recommendations, as soon as practicable. It was noted that SEPA's consultation on the sea lice Risk Assessment Framework is due before the end of 2021.

All Trusts have contributed to the review of Aquaculture regulation currently being undertaken by Professor Griggs, with a focus on ensuring that this process does not delay the agreed recommendations of the SIWG.

## **5. Planning Updates**

It was noted that appeals for the proposed SSC farm at North Arran and the proposed Organic Sea Harvest on Skye have been dismissed. It was also noted that two CAR licence appeals for new fish farm sites proposed in Orkney were also recently dismissed due to proposed locations near important Maerl bed habitats. Additionally, it was highlighted that Loch Long Salmon's planning proposal for Scotland's first semi-enclosed fish farm is now live, and the public consultation will close at the end of November.

Fisheries Management Scotland have provided further input to SEPA for the first of the three proposed CAR licences for new Dawnfresh sites in the Clyde and will keep members informed of any developments.

**ACTION:** CM will circulate Planning Portal updates to the Committee by e-mail.

## **6. Environmental Management Plans – Overview & Monitoring**

Fisheries Management Scotland continue to support members across the West Coast to ensure that EMPs continue to progress and are as robust as possible. Working alongside members, CM is collating an overview of all current EMPs in place and in progress to ensure that the underlying principles for EMPs remain consistent across regions and companies, and to support with end-of-cycle and ad-hoc review meetings as necessary. CM continues to meet with local Planning Authorities to discuss EMPs as appropriate.

## **7. Fish Health Inspectorate Engagement**

There was a discussion on various members' interactions with FHI this year, and how the weekly published sea lice levels on the Scottish Government website has provided a greater degree of information which has triggered discussion with FHI. Members noted that information regarding on-farm fish health and treatment plans could be more forthcoming.

**ACTION:** CM and AW to continue to engage with Marine Scotland and FHI and to update members on progress.

## **8. Industry Engagement**

The Committee discussed efforts to put in place suitable local engagement mechanisms between farmed and wild fish interests – a recommendation of the Salmon Interactions Working Group. The discussion included the area/companies that should be covered, the scope of the engagement, and the strong drive for progress on this recommendation from the Scottish Parliament.

**ACTION:** CM to engage further with FMS members and operators to take this forward.

## **9. Marine Scotland Genetic Introgression Study**

Marine Scotland recently published a [national assessment of the influence of farmed salmon escapes on the genetic integrity of wild Scottish Atlantic salmon populations](#), and this was welcomed by the Committee. There was a discussion around the thresholds and cut-off points for genetic introgression used in the study, and it was noted that Marine Scotland stated that a conservative approach was adopted to minimise the chance that wild fish were incorrectly classified as hybrids. It is hoped that further research providing more detail on the levels of introgression can be conducted in future. The potential for integrating this work with local monitoring of introgression in Lochaber and the Ness district by the University of the Highlands and Islands (associated with Mowi freshwater production and ASC certification) was also discussed.

## **10. Sweep Netting Data Collection Tool**

The Scottish Fisheries Coordination Centre is developing a number of data collection tools for members to use, including a tool relating to monitoring sea lice on wild fish. CM demonstrated the capabilities of a tool for collecting this data and noted feedback from the Committee. It was highlighted that displaying this data visually in a way that is easily accessible, would be valued by members, but there was also a general preference to continue to input data using Microsoft Excel.

**ACTION:** CM to work with SFCC to improve the tool with feedback received from members ahead of a trial of the tool in 2022.

## **11. Certifications Update; Aquaculture Stewardship Council and Code of Good Practice**

CM gave an overview of farms currently in the Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) scheme, and of those coming up for assessment. There was a discussion around the scheme and the indicators which are designed to protect wild fish, including the ongoing revision of the sea lice indicator (3.1.7. of the Salmon Standard). Additionally, the Committee discussed the certification process and the opportunities to raise stakeholder concerns.

It was also mentioned that Salmon Scotland's (formerly SSPO) Code of Good Practice is currently going through a revision.

**ACTION:** CM to circulate guidance for engaging with ASC assessments.

**ACTION:** CM to contact ASC/ Lloyd's Register to further understand the use of 'Critical' non-conformities in the scheme.

## **12. AOB**

None.