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Salmon & Trout Association exposes sham of salmon farming industry claims

Dossier of material obtained under freedom of information reveals alarming results of Government inspections of Scottish salmon farms including high levels of sea-lice – the major concern for wild fish conservation

The Salmon & Trout Association (S&TA), today published a dossier based on hitherto unpublished Scottish Government Fish Health Inspectorate reports of inspections of Scottish salmon farms from 2009 and 2010, obtained under freedom of information law.

The reports of inspection visits to Scottish salmon farms made by Government inspectors over the last two years reveal:

- 68 instances of fish-farms recorded as having sea-lice levels above the thresholds recommended in the industry's own Code of Good Practice during the period for which records were inspected;
- 52 instances of fish-farms recorded as having other sea-lice related issues, such as damage or mortality caused by sea-lice, or high lice loads on sampled fish;
- 48 instances of fish-farms reported as not recording farm sea-lice numbers in accordance with industry standards;
- 21 instances concerning evidence of a lack of efficacy of, or tolerance to, or potential resistance to available sea-lice treatments, including unexpectedly low sea-lice clearance rates using licensed treatments and failure to control sea-lice numbers; and
- Concerns related to the proper containment of farmed fish, including the presence of misshapen cages, nets with holes or tears, either deliberately or otherwise made, and nets sagging at or below the water line

S&TA CEO, Paul Knight, commented:

“This dossier lays bare the reality of what is happening on Scotland’s marine fish-farms. The breaches of the industry’s own Code of Good Practice, in which Scottish Government places so much faith, are so widespread as to call into question the Code’s basic credibility.”

“There are no unannounced inspections. They are all by prior arrangement – with up to ten days’ notice given. This gives ample time for the farm operators to carry out as much remedial action as possible”.

Mr Knight emphasised:

“These are Scottish Government’s own inspections. They indicate a disregard for the environment, yet no enforcement action has been taken by the Government against the companies concerned. The dossier is very strong evidence of the desperate need for strict regulations that are properly enforced”.

Guy Linley-Adams, solicitor to S&TA’s Aquaculture Campaign and compiler of the dossier, said:

“The information contained within the inspectors’ reports gives the lie to the bland reassurances we are given by the salmon farming industry and indeed Scottish Government that the industry is properly regulated. The devil is in the detail – now we have seen at least some of that detail and it is not pretty, revealing the true extent of the threat to wild fish conservation from sea-lice emanating from Scottish salmon farms”.

It is impossible to know for how long sea-lice numbers are high on each fish-farm and the relative severity of any sea-lice infestation – a situation that does not exist in Norway where the fish-farming industry has to report weekly sea-lice count data to state authorities, to which the general public then has a right of access.

As a result of these findings, Paul Knight now challenges the Scottish Government to amend its legislation to create greater transparency and more accountability in the fish farming industry. He declared:

“The right of the Scottish to see detailed information about sea-lice numbers on any fish-farm, bringing Scotland into line with Norway, can be secured through a very simple amendment to secondary legislation. We would urge the next Scottish Government to do just that.

“Further, there is no co-ordinated farm-specific statutory recording of a lack of efficacy of, tolerance to, or resistance to sea-lice treatments in Scotland, unlike in Norway where it is a legal requirement to report such events to state authorities. This also requires an appropriate amendment to bring Scottish law into line with Norway”.

S&TA is working in conjunction with Fish Legal to protect wild salmon and sea trout from the impact of poorly-operated and regulated fish farming.

The dossier - "Inspections of marine salmon farms in Scotland carried out by the Fish Health Inspectorate during 2009 and 2010 – sea-lice and containment issues" - and the accompanying Appendix, both compiled by Guy Linley-Adams, are attached.

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Notes to Editors

- 1) The Salmon & Trout Association (S&TA) was established in 1903 to address the damage done to our rivers by the polluting effects of the Industrial Revolution. For 107 years, the Association has worked to protect fisheries, fish stocks and the wider aquatic environment on behalf of game angling and fisheries. S&TA has charitable status in both England and Scotland. S&TA's charitable objectives empower it to address all issues affecting fish and the aquatic environment, supported by strong scientific evidence from its scientific network. Its charitable status enables it to take the widest possible remit in protecting salmonid fish stocks, and the aquatic environment upon which they depend. www.salmon-trout.org
- 2) Fish Health Inspectorate reports of inspections of marine salmon farms from 2009 and 2010 were obtained pursuant to the EC Directive on Public Access to Environmental Information (2003/4/EC) as implemented in Scotland by the Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations 2004.
- 3) Guy Linley-Adams is a solicitor in private practice, qualified both in England and Scotland, and is solicitor to S&TA's Aquaculture Campaign – guy@linley-adams.co.uk, www.linley-adams.co.uk