

17 March 2026

Rural Affairs and Islands Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh

Dear Members of the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee,

Review of Salmon Farming in Scotland

We write on behalf of the Shetland Fishermen's Association and the Western Isles Fishermen's Association to contribute to the Committee's ongoing review of salmon farming in Scotland. Our members and their families have fished these waters for generations, relying on healthy marine ecosystems and continued access to the traditional grounds that sustain their livelihoods. They have asked that their concerns be clearly and accurately reflected as part of this important process.

For many of our members, the continued expansion of salmon aquaculture has created growing anxiety about the pressures being placed on the waters surrounding Shetland and the Western Isles. These waters have supported fishing communities for centuries, and any decline in their ecological condition has immediate and profound consequences for the viability of wild-caught fisheries.

A central concern is the impact of salmon farming on the wider marine environment, including potential effects on wild fish stocks, shellfish populations, and sensitive seabed habitats. Fishermen have observed changes in areas adjacent to salmon farms and believe that the cumulative effects could be impacting on their fisheries. The interactions between farmed and wild species require far more rigorous, transparent, and independent assessment. While direct causal evidence is still developing, there is a genuine and reasonable fear that the natural balance of these waters is approaching, or may already be exceeding, sustainable limits.

Alongside ecological concerns, our members are increasingly affected by the loss of traditional sheltered fishing grounds to aquaculture infrastructure. This displacement is particularly severe for scallop and nephrops fishermen, whose sheltered grounds are inherently limited and cannot be relocated. Once a scallop ground is lost, it is lost permanently. The expansion of salmon farming has therefore created a direct spatial conflict that disproportionately impacts small-scale, inshore, and shellfish-dependent fleets.

Fishermen strongly believe that the burden of proof must now shift. For decades, wild-caught fisheries have been managed under a precautionary approach, with activity restricted unless it can be demonstrated that it will not cause unacceptable harm. We respectfully submit that the same principle should apply to salmon farming. It is no

longer adequate to assume that impacts are minimal or manageable; the industry must demonstrate, through robust, independent evidence, that its operations do not damage wild fish, shellfish, or their habitats.

We therefore urge the Committee to recommend:

- A precautionary approach to any further expansion of salmon farming, particularly in areas of high importance to wild fisheries.
- Stronger, independent environmental monitoring capable of detecting impacts on wild stocks and seabed habitats.
- A clear requirement for the salmon farming industry to demonstrate that its activities do not negatively affect wild-caught fisheries.
- A more balanced spatial planning framework that recognises the limited and irreplaceable nature of sheltered fishing grounds, especially for inshore mobile geared vessels scallop fisheries.

Our members are not opposed to aquaculture. They recognise its economic importance to Scotland and its vital contribution to island communities. However, they firmly believe that growth must not come at the expense of the marine environment or the long-term sustainability of wild fisheries. A fair, precautionary, and evidence-led regulatory framework is essential to ensure that both sectors can coexist without one undermining the other.

We appreciate the Committee's attention to these issues and would welcome the opportunity to provide further evidence or participate in future discussions.

Yours sincerely,



Sheila Keith
Executive Officer
Shetland Fishermen's Association



Duncan MacInnes
Secretary
Western Isles Fishermen's Association