RSPB Scotland Parliamentary Briefing

Scottish Aquaculture – A Fresh Start?
The Renewed Strategic Framework for Scottish Aquaculture

RSPB Scotland welcomes the Government’s review of the Strategic Framework for Scottish Aquaculture. We felt that the original Strategic Framework had significant shortcomings and we hope that this second iteration - the Renewed Strategic Framework - can lead to measurable improvements in the environmental performance of the Scottish aquaculture industry. However, the Renewed Strategic Framework must be considered within the context of Scotland’s first Marine Bill, which should provide a framework for all industries and activities throughout Scotland’s seas.

Seabirds are a key indicator of the health of our seas. Monitoring on RSPB’s coastal reserves this summer gave a grave prognosis for Scotland’s famed seabird colonies; repeated annual breeding failures are now substantially reducing populations of certain species, with some experiencing massive population declines. These worrying trends make it even more crucial that true environmental sustainability is enshrined in the Renewed Strategic Framework, and in the imminent Scottish Marine Bill.

Sustainable development
In his foreword to the Renewed Strategic Framework, the Minister for the Environment says: “Scottish Ministers want an aquaculture industry that is ambitious, thriving, growing, diverse and profitable”. RSPB Scotland believes the Renewed Strategic Framework should not have the objective for securing unabated economic growth, but instead should aim for sustainable development, founded on the five guiding principles of sustainable development (in line with the Scottish Government’s own Sustainable Development Strategy\(^1\)). Simply pursuing ‘increased economic growth’ with no sustainability caveat is not consistent with these principles, nor with the Scottish Government’s National Performance Framework.

The value of Scotland’s marine environment is beyond economic calculation. However, fish farmers and regulators must agree that their industry is entirely dependent on a healthy marine ecosystem. The best way to enhance the marine environment’s economic contribution is to ensure that it, and its biodiversity, are adequately protected and, where there is degradation, allowed to recover.

The Minister could be asked how he will ensure that a growing aquaculture industry is consistent with the Scottish Government’s own Sustainable Development Strategy.

International commitments
Ensuring that environmental protection and recovery is central to aquaculture management is essential for the Scottish and UK governments to deliver international commitments including those under the OSPAR convention\(^2\), the World Summit on Sustainable Development\(^3\), and the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD). The MSFD demands a strategic approach to

\(^1\) Choosing the Future: Scotland’s Sustainable Development Strategy, Scottish Executive 2005. The 5 guiding principles of sustainable development are: living within environmental limits; ensuring a strong, healthy and just society; achieving a sustainable economy; promoting good governance; and using science responsibly.

\(^2\) OSPAR Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic

\(^3\) WSSD commits all contracting states to significantly reducing biodiversity loss by 2010
the conservation of marine ecosystems, including achieving Good Environmental Status for our seas by 2020, and addressing all human activities - including aquaculture - that have an impact on the marine environment. It is also essential for compliance with the EU Water Framework Directive and the Water Environment and Water Services (Scotland) Act 2003 (the WEWS Act) which requires that all inland and coastal waters out to 3 nautical miles achieve Good Ecological Status by 2015.

The Minister could be asked how the Renewed Strategic Framework will help Scotland meet its many imminent international commitments to sustainable development, reducing biodiversity loss and creating marine protected areas.

Scotland’s first Marine Bill
The Scottish Marine Bill is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to deliver sustainable, well-managed seas. Aquaculture management, and any plans and objectives stemming from the Renewed Strategic Framework, must be considered within the context of the Scottish Marine Bill. RSPB Scotland has welcomed the Scottish Government’s proposals for a Scottish Marine Bill based on the principles of the ecosystem approach and sustainable development. In particular, we strongly support proposals for:

- A statutory system of Marine Spatial Planning based on the three tier approach of local, national and regional seas plans;
- Improved Marine Nature Conservation, including a comprehensive network of marine protected areas to support the protection of species, habitats and ecosystems of international and Scottish importance;
- A Marine Management Organisation (‘Marine Scotland’) to act as lead decision making body on maritime issues; and
- A set of Marine Ecosystem Objectives (MEOs) to direct plans and measure progress.

As with other sectoral activities, control for aquaculture should lie with Marine Scotland. This is the most appropriate solution for consistency, integration and simplification of marine management. Aquaculture must also be fully integrated into the marine spatial planning system, which will guide all decision-making on the siting and development of farms. Indicators and objectives used to measure the success of the Renewed Strategic Framework must be nested within the wider suite of Marine Ecosystem Objectives developed by the new legislation, and must be consistent with UK and EU agreed marine objectives.

Given the Government’s intention to introduce a Marine Bill that sets overarching objectives, the Minister could be asked to detail how the implementation of the Renewed Strategic Framework will work within, and contribute to, these wider developments in marine management.

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