

Regulation of fish farms streamlined as authorisation for wellboat discharges transfers to SEPA

Regulation of marine fish farming wellboats has transferred to the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) as part of a package to strengthen and streamline the regulation of the industry.

- SEPA takes on new powers to regulate chemical treatment residues from wellboats, to add to existing regulation of in-pen treatments.
- Transfer of powers streamlines regulation and makes it easier to ensure combined discharges from fish farms and wellboats meet environmental standards.
- A high quality environment and abundant freshwater resources are vital to all of Scotland's communities and business – including the aquaculture sector.
- SEPA's role in the regulation of aquaculture is to protect the marine environment by ensuring that the aquaculture industry meets environmental standards.
- Fishfarm operators will be able to apply to SEPA from Monday 9 November for new authorisations – existing licenses will transfer on Monday 30 November.
- Change follows recommendations from the Independent Review of Aquaculture Consenting

Regulation of marine fish farming wellboats has transferred to the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) as part of a package to strengthen and streamline the regulation of the industry.

New applications will be accepted by SEPA from Monday 9 November. Existing Marine Scotland licenses will transfer to SEPA on Monday 30 November.

Until now an operator would require a marine licence with Marine Scotland for discharges from wellboats, with a separate licence from SEPA for the same chemicals being used directly in fish farm cages. This dual regulation was considered unnecessarily complex and the 2016 Independent Review of Aquaculture Consenting recommended that the two be consolidated – this change marking the completion of this work.

Following two Scottish Parliamentary inquiries and SEPA's biggest ever public consultation, in 2019 the regulator introduced its Finfish Aquaculture Sector Plan and a Revised Regulatory Regime. Both were clear in their aspirations for a sector which recognises that protecting the environment is fundamental to its success and foremost in all its plans and operations.

A high quality environment and abundant freshwater resources are vital to all of Scotland's communities and business – including the aquaculture sector.

SEPA's role in the regulation of aquaculture is to protect the marine environment by ensuring that the aquaculture industry meets environmental standards.

By regulating discharges from both wellboats and in cage treatments, SEPA will be able to more simply and easily ensure that any combined discharge meets environmental standards, even when operators wish to treat parts of their stock using different methods on the same day.

Terry A'Hearn, Chief Executive of SEPA, said:

"Bringing control of all medicine discharges under SEPA's regulatory role is a positive step that will simplify the operation of discharge controls by enabling us to provide farms with a single, outcome-focused permit for all their discharges.

"This change makes regulatory responsibilities clearer and the transfer from Marine Scotland to ourselves will allow us to respond directly to any concerns raised about the operation of wellboats at finfish farms.

"We have also discussed the proposed transfer with representatives of the sector who have indicated that they would like to work with us to explore opportunities for strengthened approaches to demonstrating and checking compliance for any such discharges – and for innovation, such as investment in medicine residue capture and treatment."

SEPA regulates discharges from finfish farms by issuing permits that limit the levels of pollutants that they discharge to the water environment. During 2021, SEPA plans to transfer all existing marine finfish farms on to the new Marine Pen Regulatory Framework. This will involve replace existing current permits with a new finfish farm permit.

Farms with an existing permission to discharge bath treatment medicine residues will have a permit that provides the option to make the discharge directly from the pens or via a wellboat at the farm. The current limits on the quantity of medicine residues that can be discharged, including via a combination of discharges from wellboat and pen, will not change. Once the new permit is in place, a separate wellboat permit will no longer be required and will be revoked.

Where an existing CAR licence does not currently authorise discharge of chemical residues, an application to vary the permit would be required.

In addition to strengthening SEPA's own regulatory regime the organisation continues to work closely with Marine Scotland's licencing team.

ENDS

Notes to editors