

SEPA's new finfish aquaculture regulatory framework

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A new firm, evidence-based regulatory framework has been introduced for Scotland's finfish aquaculture sector by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), one of a number of organisations regulating the sector. The framework will further strengthen the protection of the marine environment for the people of Scotland.

- New firm, evidence-based revised regulatory framework introduced for Scotland's finfish aquaculture sector by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), one of a number of organisations regulating the sector.
- Developed following twenty-two months of work by SEPA and implements proposals announced in November 2018 which were subject to Scotland-wide consultation.
- The framework follows 2018 SEPA research into the impact of Scottish salmon farms, peer reviewed and published in international journal, *Science of the Total Environment*.

Launched on 1st June 2019, the revised regulatory framework follows twenty-two months of work by SEPA and implements proposals announced in November 2018 which were subject to Scotland-wide consultation.

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The new framework, which will apply to all new Scottish finfish aquaculture applications, includes:

MORE POWERFUL MODELLING USING THE BEST AVAILABLE SCIENCE

The new regulatory framework will take advantage of more accurate computer modelling approaches that will improve our understanding of the risk to the local environment and allow assessment of the larger-scale impacts including interactions with other farms.

The science about fish farming is very complex and the new approach will bring the aquaculture sector up to date with the modelling practices which are being used for other industrial sectors where there is a longer history of operation and analysis.

A NEW TIGHTER STANDARD FOR THE ORGANIC WASTE DEPOSITED BY FISH FARMS

Marine pen fish farming across Scotland operates using open-net pens. Fish faeces; any uneaten food; used fish medicines and other chemical treatments escape from these pens into the marine environment. The heavier, organic

particles (the fish faeces and uneaten food) together with any medicines sticking to them are deposited on the sea floor. Natural biological processes then break down and assimilate the material over time.

The tighter standard limits the spatial extent of the mixing zone around farms. The controls applied to these mixing zones will bring them into equivalence with modern practice on mixing zones for other waste effluent discharges into the sea, including those from urban waste water.

NEW APPROACH TO SUSTAINABLE SITING OF FARMS

The combination of a new standard, a more accurate model and enhanced monitoring will allow the siting of farms in the most appropriate areas where the environment can assimilate wastes. It allows SEPA to better match biomass to the capacity available in the environment and continue to assess that through the operation of the site.

The new framework encourages operators to site and operate fish farms in environmentally less sensitive waters and use improved practices and technologies, such as containment, to reduce environmental impacts. It may allow for the approval of larger farms than would have been traditionally approved previously, provided they are appropriately sited in sustainable locations.

SEPA has seen some industry operators successfully developing new approaches such as non-chemical ways of managing fish health. Our new framework supports these encouraging developments.

ENHANCED ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING

Operators are now required to invest in more accurate monitoring, including of waste coming from fish farms. Officers are already engaged in a programme of unannounced visits to confirm compliance with regulatory requirements. SEPA will also increase and strengthen monitoring of the impact of fish farms in surrounding areas.

INVOLVING COMMUNITIES AND STAKEHOLDERS

As one of a number of organisations regulating finfish aquaculture, SEPA believes its new firm, evidence based framework has the potential to significantly improve the environmental performance of the industry. Recognising the diverse range of views on finfish aquaculture, SEPA held a Scotland-wide consultation where 275 people attended nine community drop-in events and 28 one to one meetings were facilitated between SEPA specialists and stakeholder groups. SEPA continues to work with all stakeholders as it implements the new framework and will establish a new National Aquaculture Stakeholder Advisory Panel.

SEPA is considering whether moving to using a feed limit or retaining a biomass limit in the permit is the most effective parameter to use to regulate the scale of impact from fish farms. Over the next three months, SEPA will consult with all interested stakeholders on these options before a final decision is made. In the interim, organic waste releases will continue

to be limited using fish biomass.

Terry A'Hearn, Chief Executive of the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, said:

“As one of a number of organisations regulating finfish aquaculture, SEPA is clear that our job is to make sure environmental standards protect the marine environment for the people of Scotland and we make sure the industry meets those standards.

“Implementing our new firm, evidence-based revised regulatory framework, which follows over twenty-two months of work, more science and more listening to stakeholders than ever before, is an important milestone. It makes powerfully clear our aspirations and requirement that the industry reach and maintain full compliance with Scotland’s environmental protection laws, where SEPA will help those investing in innovation and moving beyond compliance.

“It makes clear too our own commitment to more stringent science, modelling, monitoring, and unannounced inspections and to continuing to listen to communities, NGOs and industry through SEPA’s new National Aquaculture Stakeholder Advisory Panel.”

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS:

SEPA’S AQUACULTURE HUB