

# Demand for protection of Scottish salmon roe



Email chain reveals call for import ban on eggs from rivals like Norway

**EXCLUSIVE**  
BY KIRSTEEN PATERSON

**S**COTTISH salmon could become a “complete mockery” after ministers failed to protect native species, the head of a major fish firm claims.

In a scathing letter to Rural Economy Secretary Fergus Ewing, the head of the country’s largest independent salmon egg producer hit out over the Scottish Government’s refusal to introduce “protection” for wild fish.

In the message, released under Freedom of Information legislation, Neil Manchester of Hendrix Genetics says the failure to impose an import ban on roe for the country’s lucrative salmon farms will leave Scotland’s multi-billion pound industry “reliant on imported eggs” from rivals like Norway and Iceland and make a “mockery of the brand ‘Scottish salmon’”.

This, Manchester said, poses a “massive risk” to the supply chain and a danger to wild stocks if the “foreign” fish escape into the country’s rivers.

It has also forced a change of strategy for Landcatch, the Argyll breeding centre which has worked with scientists at Edinburgh, Glasgow and Stirling universities on genetic breakthroughs aimed at countering

sea lice, the potentially deadly pests that plague fish farms by causing costly losses of the penned produce.

The parasites are also a major concern to environmentalists who fear the explosion in fish farming could see the suckers spread through key waters in increasing numbers.

The Ormsary facility, set up in 1980 by the Port Glasgow-based Lithgow family, was heavily supported by Scottish Enterprise in the 1990s but Manchester, whose firm acquired the site several years ago, told Ewing its plans were “destroyed” by competition problems.

The claim is based on the impact of Norway’s decision to bar Scottish roe from its salmon farms.

Landcatch had hoped to break into the market there, but the Norwegian Ministry of Climate and Environment ruled doing so could threaten its biodiversity.

The ministry said its decision was “based on scientific assessments” that concluded that “escapes of farmed salmon of partly Scottish origin increases the probability of negative effects on the Norwegian wild salmon populations”. This includes “a high probability” of “genetic mixing” that would “increase the loss of genetic diversity”.

Urging Ewing to intervene in a message sent earlier this month, Manchester stated: “If the minister accepts this decision, and thereby the reasoning behind it, then he must answer why he is unwilling to afford the same level of protection to wild Scottish salmon.”

Data released last spring show nine out of ten salmon farmed in Scotland are reared from eggs imported from

## How much is the salmon industry worth to Scotland?

EXPORTS of Scottish salmon hit their highest ever value after leaping by more than one third last year, figures show.

Overseas sales were worth £600 million in 2017, according to figures released earlier this year by Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs.

The US is the biggest foreign market, with sales hitting £193m over the year.

France followed at £188m, with sales to China worth

£69m and Ireland at £34m. At the time the information was released, Scotts Landsburgh, chief executive of the Scottish Salmon Producers’ Organisation, cited “taste, quality and provenance” as key drivers of growth across the US, EU and Asia.

Rural Economy Secretary Fergus Ewing agreed, vowing that the Scottish Government would “do all we can to support and protect our food and drink sector” as Brexit looms.

Meanwhile, the country’s booming aquaculture sector

– which includes the farming of fish and shellfish – has published its blueprint for continued success.

Under the plan, it could grow to reach an annual value of £3.6 billion by 2030, supporting an additional 9000 jobs.

If achieved, this would see headcount more than double from the current level of around 8500.

But giving evidence before MSPs probing the sector recently, Ewing said this growth would not be supported “at any cost”.



**The letter urged Rural Economy Secretary Fergus Ewing to intervene**

overseas. Last night the Scottish Government confirms it has “no plans” to bring in new restrictions.

It stated: “The Scottish Government is disappointed by the Norwegian decision to refuse the import of Scottish derived Atlantic salmon ova. “We do not consider Atlantic salmon ova of Norwegian origin to be an alien or locally absent species according to the definitions provided in EU Regulation and have no plans to restrict their import into Scotland.”

But campaign group Scottish Salmon Watch, which wants tougher controls on the sector, says the email chain is evidence of the “scam” played on consumers buying prod-

ucts labelled “Scottish salmon”. Calling for a ban on roe imports, director Don Staniford called the situation “extremely embarrassing” for Holyrood leaders, adding: “It speaks volumes that the Norwegian government is fighting to protect biodiversity and values wild salmon highly while the Scottish Government is happy to sell wild salmon down the river.”

“Scottish’ salmon is a sham, scam and a consumer con.”

Speaking to The National, Manchester said the livestock trade “is built on movement of genetic material” and provenance relates to the country animals are reared in. He said Dutch-owned Hendrix Genetics “accepts the decision” and will “focus on supporting the Scottish industry”.



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