Innovation Sites Meeting, 6 May 2016 – Pre-meeting bullet point briefing

Background

The idea of an Innovation Site has been discussed in various incarnations with SEPA over almost the last decade, first known as a Demonstration Site (2007), then Concept Site (2013) and now an Innovation Site (2015).

Key points

- These proposals have all been characterised by one key feature – the establishment of a very large fish farm site a number of times beyond what would be suggested are sustainable using SEPA's current modelling assessments;

- The proposals have been suggested as an opportunity to "see what happens" when a large farm is established and a challenge to the basis for the current 2500t ceiling on the biomass of fish which can be held at a fish farm ;

- The ceiling was put in place by SEPA because of concerns over the ability of the model used by SEPA, known as AutoDEPOMOD, to predict impacts beyond this tonnage;

- Establishing a very large farm when the best available predictive models suggest it will be utterly unsustainable has never been considered tenable by SEPA, nor can it be considered "Innovative";

- The scale of the suggested sites is considerable, the most recent proposal for an Innovation Site in Orkney was based on a farm of 6-8000 tonnes such a site has a population equivalent of c0.4 – 0.8 million people;

- Changes to the AutoDEPMOD model and the licensing framework used by SEPA will mean that there will no longer be a 2500 tonne ceiling on biomass but sustainable increases above this will be possible for many sites;

SEPA's Current Preferred View of Innovation Sites

- In response to the idea of Concept Sites in 2013, SEPA prepared a paper with Marine Scotland welcoming the idea of a large Concept Site provided the proposal was supported by modelling of the wider scale impacts as well as the usual site specific AutoDEPOMOD impact modelling required by SEPA. No applications based on this approach were forthcoming;

- Since then, the imminent upgrade of the AutoDEPOMOD model and the change in licensing arrangements negates any justification which may have existed for a very large as an Innovation/Concept Site;

- SEPA considers that the biggest challenge facing the industry is sea louse control and that innovation in this area is what is urgently required to support the ongoing growth of and future of salmon farming in Scotland. SEPA staff have pushed this idea since the last Innovation Site meetings in 2015/16;

- Such innovation may include the adoption of new approaches to louse control currently in development in Norway, or real innovation developed in Scotland and the use of such techniques on a site here to prove the concept in Scottish waters;

- There may also be opportunities to link "beyond compliance" type initiatives into the idea of Innovation Sites, this may better suit land based hatchery facilities used for the production of young salmon;

- One Beyond Compliance issue that has been discussed, which is similar to work undertaken with distillers, is the idea of using organic waste at a land-based hatchery site for energy production to reduce both waste arisings and energy consumption.

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