

Media Backgrounder: Chris Packham & RSPCA Assured Scottish Salmon (October 2023)

The Sunday Mail [reported \(15 October 2023\)](#):

Chris Packham calls for Scots salmon farming industry probe after zombie fish scandal

Chris Packham has urged the Scottish Government after the Sunday Mail revealed damning footage of 'zombie salmon' and mass deaths of thousands of fish at a Highland farm.

NEWS By Dawn Thompson
04:30, 15 OCT 2023

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Naturalist Chris Packham has called for an independent investigation into the multi-million pound **Scottish salmon farming industry**.

And he has accused the **SNP** and **Greens** coalition **government** at Holyrood of “riding roughshod” over welfare and environmental issues.

Packham, president of Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to animals (RSPCA), wants to see stricter regulation in the industry – with bans slapped on those who fail to meet high standards.

His intervention comes after the **Sunday Mail** revealed damning footage of badly wounded zombie salmon at a Highland farm. We also exposed mass deaths of thousands of fish at the site.

In an exclusive interview, TV presenter Packham, 62, said: “The Scottish Government hasn’t regulated the practices in a strict enough way. Therefore they have been able to ride roughshod over any welfare and environmental concerns.

“We need an independent review, commissioned by the Scottish Government, into this entire practice, the industry as a whole and its environmental, economic and animal welfare impact.”

Earlier this year, underwater footage from activist Don Staniford, revealed by the Sunday Mail, showed badly wounded salmon in cages at Faroese-owned Bakkafrost’s Portree site off the Isle of Skye. Last month, drone images captured thousands of dead fish being hauled from the water over four consecutive days at the RSPCA Assured site.



📺 footage of wounded 'zombie salmon' at a Scottish fish farm sparked a welfare investigation. (Image: Don Staniford)

Reacting to [The Sunday Mail article](#), Don Staniford, Director of \$camon \$cotland, said:

“The RSPCA must pull the plug on the shameless welfare-washing of Scottish salmon via RSPCA Assured. Certifying salmon farms in Scotland as 'responsible' is destroying the credibility of the RSPCA. The RSPCA should return the blood money it rakes in from deadly salmon farming. Anyone seeing the shocking video evidence and horrific death rates cannot escape the conclusion that Scottish salmon farming is inherently irresponsible. RSPCA president Chris Packham can stop the suffering of tens of millions of fish by rescinding RSPCA Assured accreditation of Scottish salmon. Salmon farming in Scotland is dead in the warming water - instead of throwing it a lifeline via RSPCA Assured the RSPCA should campaign for the closure of all Scottish salmon farms. Until this lethal industry is shut down completely, consumers should boycott all RSPCA Assured Scottish salmon.”



In February 2020, [The Sunday Times reported](#) on how the RSPCA was paid £513,000 by salmon farming companies to welfare-wash Scottish salmon in 2019 (up 15% from £446,481 in 2018 and 9% more than the £468,808 paid in 2017):

THE SUNDAY TIMES

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RSPCA paid over £500,000 to back salmon industry



Packham: will raise concerns

Mark Macaskill

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) has revealed it was paid more than £500,000 by Scottish salmon farmers for membership of an ethical food scheme.

The charity admitted the money was received this year from 150 farms – about 60% of the industry – who have signed up to RSPCA Assured, a food label dedicated to farm animal welfare.

The disclosure has triggered fresh criticism of the RSPCA for supporting salmon farming amid claims that millions of fish suffer despite the industry's efforts to improve standards.

This weekend, naturalist Chris Packham, a vice-president of the RSPCA, said he intends to raise concerns with the charity's top executives. In a tweet to his 386,000 followers, he wrote: "Open cage salmon farming is fraught with very serious issues and clearly needs reform/regulation/cessation. I will liaise with @RSPCA_official to work urgently towards a renewed position

THE SUNDAY TIMES

NEWS | SCOTTISH NEWS

from their POV. I'm on it!"

Under the RSPCA scheme, salmon farms pay an annual membership – currently £583 – and a quarterly licence fee based on the amount of produce sold in the UK. Last year, about 150,000 tons of farmed Scottish salmon was produced, about half of which was exported.

According to figures that will be published later this year, RSPCA Assured generated a total income of more than £3.3m in 2019-20. The charity does not usually provide a breakdown of income by sector but released data following a request from this newspaper.

The figures show that of the £3.3m, salmon farms in Scotland contributed £513,000, 15% more than in 2018 (£446,481) and 9% more than in 2017 (£468,808).

Critics argue the charity's support of salmon farming is unsustainable because millions of fish die every year from sea lice infestations and disease. It has been challenged for not publishing a list of farms certified under the scheme or robust data to enable scrutiny of whether it has improved hus-

bandry on Scottish fish farms.

"It's great that the RSPCA wants to improve welfare standards in fish farming, but they need to be driving standards up and we cannot see any evidence of that," said Bob Elliot, director of Scottish animal welfare charity OneKind. "The level of fish deaths is eye-watering."

The RSPCA said the scheme benefits tens of millions of fish every year, with members subject to inspections to ensure minimal suffering of animals.

A spokeswoman said that last year one Scottish salmon farm was suspended for "non-compliance". "RSPCA Assured is a charity and non-profit-making," she added. "All income is ploughed back into the running of the scheme and promoting farm animal welfare." ■

The Sunday Times [reported earlier in February 2020](#):

Scientist hits out at RSPCA for backing salmon farms

Mark Macaskill

A scientist who claims farmed salmon in Scotland endure “heavy-duty suffering” has questioned one of Britain’s largest animal charities for its support of the £2bn industry.

Dr Lynne Sneddon, director of bioveterinary science at Liverpool University, said evidence that intensive farming can harm fish raised questions for Scottish aquaculture.

She described the suffering as unacceptable and challenged the RSPCA for endorsing 150 farms as ethical food producers amid research that suggests a popular lice treatment can cause pain.

Sneddon spoke out after examining a dossier of photographs, including some released by the Scottish government, of farmed fish covered in lesions, ulcers and open wounds.

“These fish are obviously damaged, so they will be in pain. If you walked past a field and saw a sheep or a cow with a massive patch of skin missing, there would be a public uproar. But because salmon are farmed under the water, all of this is hidden,” said Sneddon.

“I think really that these fish should not be allowed to live in this kind of state . . . and I would say this is totally unacceptable.”

Eddie Bowles, a solicitor with Surrey law firm Advocates for Animals, said the dossier, compiled by Don Staniford, a critic of salmon farming, indicated “systemic and obvious” pain and suffering that could justify legal action against the Scottish government for

JAMES GLOSSOP



Marine Harvest's salmon farm off the Isle of Muck. The industry is worth £2bn a year to Scotland



Sneddon: fish are suffering

breaches of the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006. “It appears that there is a strong legal case to answer,” she said.

Sneddon, who studied at Glasgow University and the Roslin Institute in Edinburgh, said the skin of fish is covered in nociceptive nerves that detect potentially painful

stimuli. It suggests that being infested with sea lice, or being pumped through a Thermolicer – a machine widely used by Scottish fish farmers that heats water to kill the parasites – is likely to inflict pain.

In December, a study published in Veterinary and Animal Science monitored the response of fish to temperatures of 28C and above, and observed “instant behavioural responses indicative of nociception or pain”.

In 2018, Kristin Ottesen of Norwegian firm HaVet linked head injuries in fish with being exposed to heated water for 30 seconds.

Sneddon said the empirical evidence strongly suggested that thermolicers “should not be used”.

The RSPCA said its

food-assurance scheme existed “only to bring about welfare improvements for farm animals” and confirmed that all certified salmon farms had been assessed in the past 12 months.

On the issue of heat treatments to kill lice, a spokeswoman said: “It’s not an easy issue to address, but in the absence currently of a concrete solution to eradicate lice, RSPCA Assured salmon farms can use mechanical lice-removal methods as long as the process is carried out responsibly and the welfare of the fish is a priority at all times.”

In 2018, Holyrood’s environment committee warned of gaps in knowledge, data, monitoring and research in the salmon farming industry.

Hamish Macdonell of the

Scottish Salmon Producers’ Organisation said farmers have an “outstanding record on fish health and welfare”. Lice levels hit a five-year low in 2018, he said, stressing that the use of Thermolicers is done under “strict health and veterinary supervision”.

Staniford, director of Scottish Salmon Watch, plans to instruct Advocates for Animals to sue ministers if he can raise money through a crowdfunding appeal.

A Scottish government spokeswoman said its responsibility to protect the marine environment, including the health and welfare of farmed fish, was taken “extremely seriously” and that research is planned to “bridge the remaining knowledge gaps on the health and welfare effects of the Thermolicer”.

More via:

[Video Exclusive: Dr Lynne Sneddon on Welfare Abuse on Scottish Salmon Farms](#)
[Welfare Abuse on Scottish Salmon Farms - Legal Action Vs Scottish Ministers & Salmon Farming Companies](#)

Chris Packham's "I'm on it" Tweet in February 2020 came in response to an [open letter to the RSPCA from Scottish Salmon Watch](#) calling for an end to the certification of Scottish Salmon via RSPCA Assured:

 **EcoHustler**  @EcoHustler · Feb 7, 2020

Dear @ChrisGPackham - do you approve of salmon farming?

Open letter to the @RSPCA_official calls for an end to the @rspcaassured certification of Scottish salmon -

ecohustler.com/technology/ope...

@onekindtweet @TheGAAIA @philip_ciwf @RebelsAnimal @Animal_Watch @Team4Nature

2 37 47

 **Chris Packham**  @ChrisGPackham

Hello . Open cage salmon farming is fraught with very serious issues and clearly needs reform/regulation/cessation . I will liaise with @RSPCA_official to work urgently towards a renewed position from their POV . I'm on it !

1:01 AM · Feb 8, 2020

16 71 145

 **Don Staniford**  @TheGAAIA

As RSPCA 'VIPs' you have the power to stop suffering on salmon farms in Scotland - please tell the RSPCA executive to end certification of Scottish salmon!

@rspcaassured tinyurl.com/wn5g3p6 @ChrisGPackham @brianblessed @BillOddie @DrBrianMay @PeterEgan6 @CarolineLucas #RSPCA



 RSPCA (England & Wales) and 9 others

7:22 AM · Feb 5, 2020 · [Twitter Web App](#)

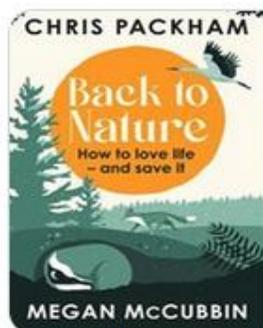
In December 2020, Chris Packham ([then a vice president of the RSPCA](#)) was [asked via Twitter](#) if his “urgent liaison” had developed a new RSPCA position on salmon farming:

 **Don Staniford**  @TheGAAIA · Dec 15, 2020 ...
Has your urgent liaison with @RSPCAChris developed a new position on salmon farming yet? How can RSPCA Assured farmed salmon be marketed this Xmas as a "higher welfare celebration" when welfare abuse is rampant on @rspcaassured salmon farms? fishfarmingexpert.com/article/rspca-...



Chris Packham’s book (with Megan McCubbin) – ‘Back to Nature’ – [published in December 2020](#) described salmon farming as a “grim apocalypse” and an “ugly and unacceptable welfare issue”:

 **Don Staniford**  @TheGAAIA ...
"On the surface the idea of farming salmon seems a good one but beneath the surface it's a grim apocalypse fuelled by power and profits" (Chris Packham & Megan McCubbin in their new book 'Back to Nature')
[@ChrisGPackham](#) [@MeganMcCubbin](#) [@TwoRoadsBooks](#)
tinyurl.com/y4ngwcc1



"On the surface the idea of farming salmon, perhaps to reduce demand for the rapidly diminishing wild stocks, seems a good one, but beneath the surface it's a grim apocalypse fuelled by power and profits"

 Rachel Burn and 6 others

8:08 AM · Dec 10, 2020

 **Don Staniford** ✓
@TheGAAIA

"Grotesquely disfigured by raw lesions; you wouldn't want these poor creatures on your plate" write [@ChrisGPackham](#) & [@MeganMcCubbin](#) in 'Back to Nature' calling salmon farming "an ugly & unacceptable welfare issue". So why does [@rspcaassured](#) still certify 70% of Scottish salmon?



 Chris Sherwood and 8 others

11:27 AM · Dec 15, 2020

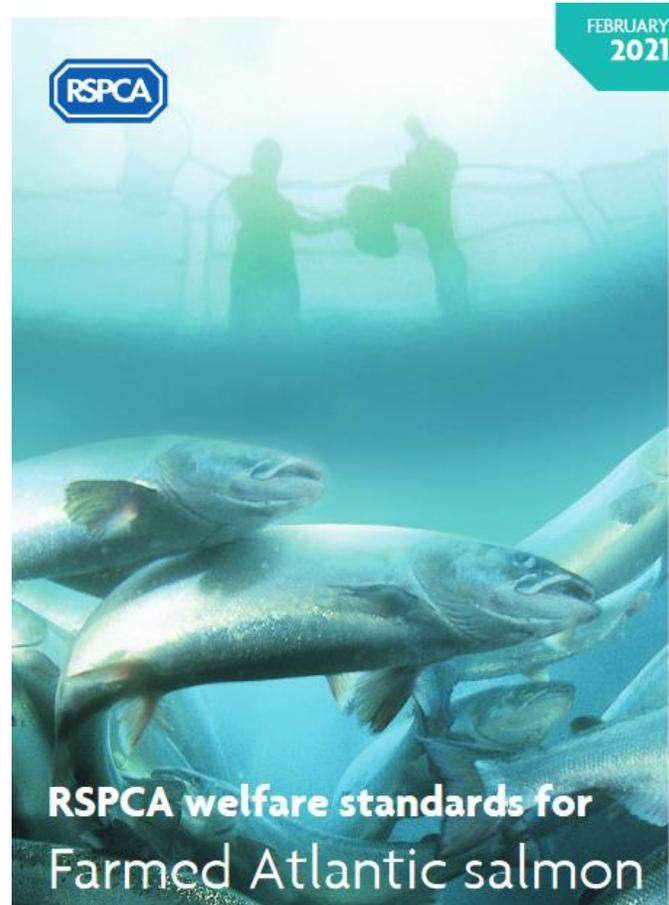


pesky scot @PeskyScot · Dec 16, 2020

Wait, wait! I think I know the answer to this one.....

... is it because the salmon farming industry paid the RSPCA £500,000?

Despite Chris Packham's negative comments (as vice president of the RSPCA), the RSPCA and RSPCA Assured continued to support salmon farming and in February 2021 [published the "RSPCA welfare standards for farmed Atlantic salmon"](#) (authored by a who's who of salmon farmers including representatives of Mowi, Scottish Sea Farms, Loch Duart, Cooke, Bakkafrost, Salmon Scotland and Hendrix).



Read more via:

[Shock drone footage show thousands of dead fish being hauled out the water at 'zombie' scandal salmon farm](#)

[Responsibly farmed? Investigation the certification of Scottish farmed salmon](#)

[Welfare charity 'satisfied' with Skye fish farm after 'zombie salmon' complaint](#)

[Disturbing 'zombie salmon' seen at UK fish farm as welfare probe launched](#)

[Leaked Videos Expose Welfare Nightmare of RSPCA Assured Scottish Salmon](#)

[RSPCA Assured Scottish salmon exposed](#)

[Rest Assured - the RSPCA has been captured, co-opted & corrupted by the Salmafia](#)

[RSPCA Sponsored Welfare Abuse of Salmon Farms - A Guide to Getting Away with Mass Murder \(Theriodicide\)!](#)

[RSPCA Sponsored Seal Killing Continues Despite US Ban?](#)

[Whitewashing Welfare Abuse of Scottish Salmon \(as sponsored via RSPCA, SSPCA & APHA\)](#)

[Sunday Times: "Scientist hits out at RSPCA for backing Scottish salmon farms"](#)

In November 2021 (during COP26), Chris Packham [suggested “getting rid of those highly polluting, nasty salmon farms” on BBC Radio Scotland](#) – listen [online here](#)



BBC Scotland News 📺 📻

@BBCScotlandNews



Chris Packham, the environmental campaigner and presenter of the BBC's Springwatch series, has visited COP26 and says the host country should "get rid of highly polluting, nasty salmon farms".

More: bbc.in/31wb1CK



6:28 PM · Nov 4, 2021



Salmon Free Falklands

November 7, 2021 · 🌐

...

• COP26 & SALMON FARMS •

After visiting COP26, BBC's Springwatch presenter Chris Packham said the host country should "get rid of highly polluting, nasty salmon farms".

Asked what more Scotland could be doing in the fight against climate change, Packham told BBC Radio Scotland's Drivetime programme that "there are obviously elephants in the room while there are salmon in those cages off the west coast".

He called for the industry to be "transitioned out" with investment so that people can be "retrained into jobs that are far more harmonious and sustainable".

<https://www.bbc.com/news/live/world-59156491>



Scrap Scottish salmon farms - Chris Packham



A ship supplies feed to a salmon farm on the west coast of Scotland

Chris Packham, the environmental campaigner and presenter of the BBC's Springwatch series, has visited COP26 and says the host country should "get rid of highly polluting, nasty salmon farms".

The industry is said to be worth more than £1bn a year to the economy, with hundreds of thousands of fish raised in pens suspended in the open sea lochs around Scotland's west coast and the Northern Isles.

The pens keep the fish - fed on processed feed - enclosed but they allow parasites to get in, with thousands of tonnes of waste getting into the surrounding water.

Asked what more Scotland could be doing in the fight against climate change, Packham told **BBC Radio Scotland's Drivetime** programme that "there are obviously elephants in the room while there are salmon in those cages off the west coast".

He called for the industry to be "transitioned out" with investment so that people can be "retrained into jobs that are far more harmonious and sustainable".

In October 2022, Scamon Scotland [wrote to the RSPCA reiterating the call to rescind certification of Scottish salmon via RSPCA Assured.](#)



In December 2022, Chris Packham [Tweeted](#):

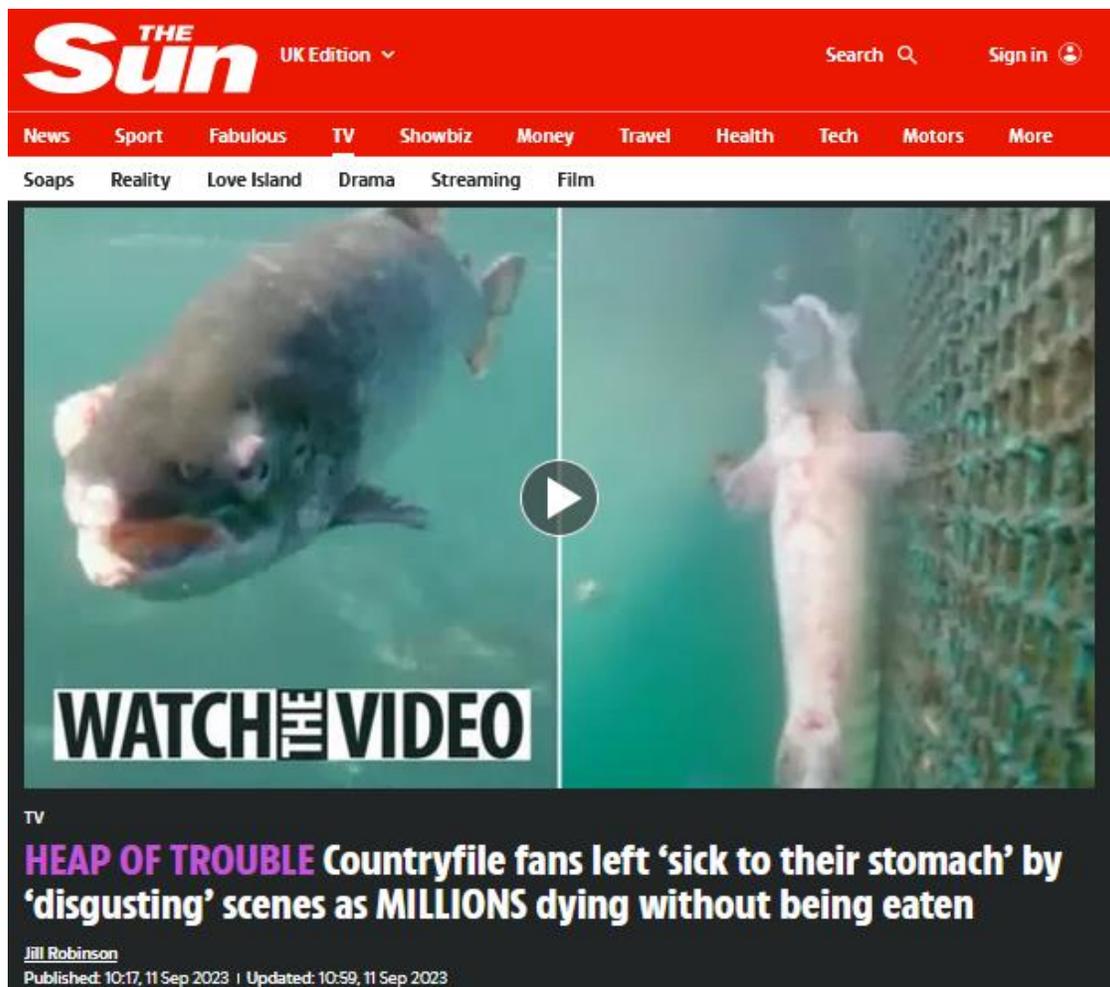


In May 2023, Chris Packham [became president of the RSPCA after almost 15 years as a vice president](#).

In August 2023, Attenti ‘Executive Recruitment Services’ [advertised for an Executive Director of RSPCA Assured](#) (after interim chief Mike Baker quit) with final panel interviews taking place the week of 30 October 2023. ‘Principal Accountabilities’ of the Executive Director of RSPCA Assured included:

- Develop the RSPCA brand and marketing campaigns to influence key stakeholders and promote RSPCA Assured brand
- Ensure the RSPCA Assured environmental and sustainability credentials are developed
- To drive new partnerships by focusing on building partnerships with food service providers, who represent very significant market share
- Build relationships with key stakeholders, including farmers, trade bodies and supermarkets to grow the numbers of partners in the RSPCA Assured Scheme.

In September 2023, [BBC Countryfile exposed welfare abuse inside RSPCA Assured salmon farms](#) – including an [interview with the RSPCA Assured’s Sean Black](#):



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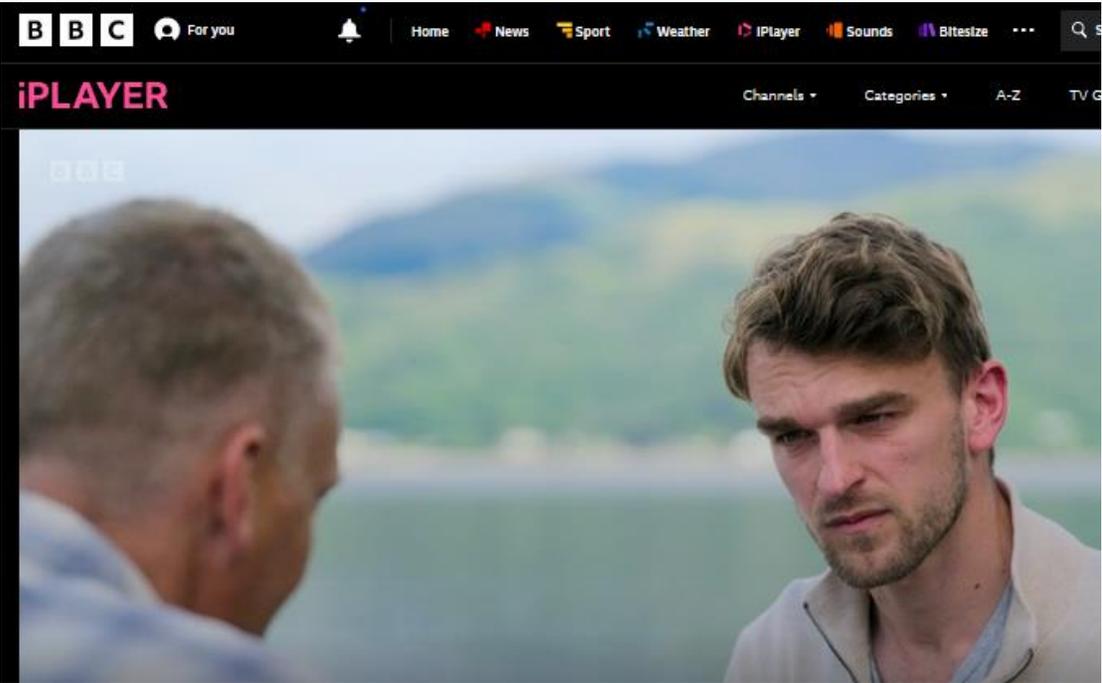
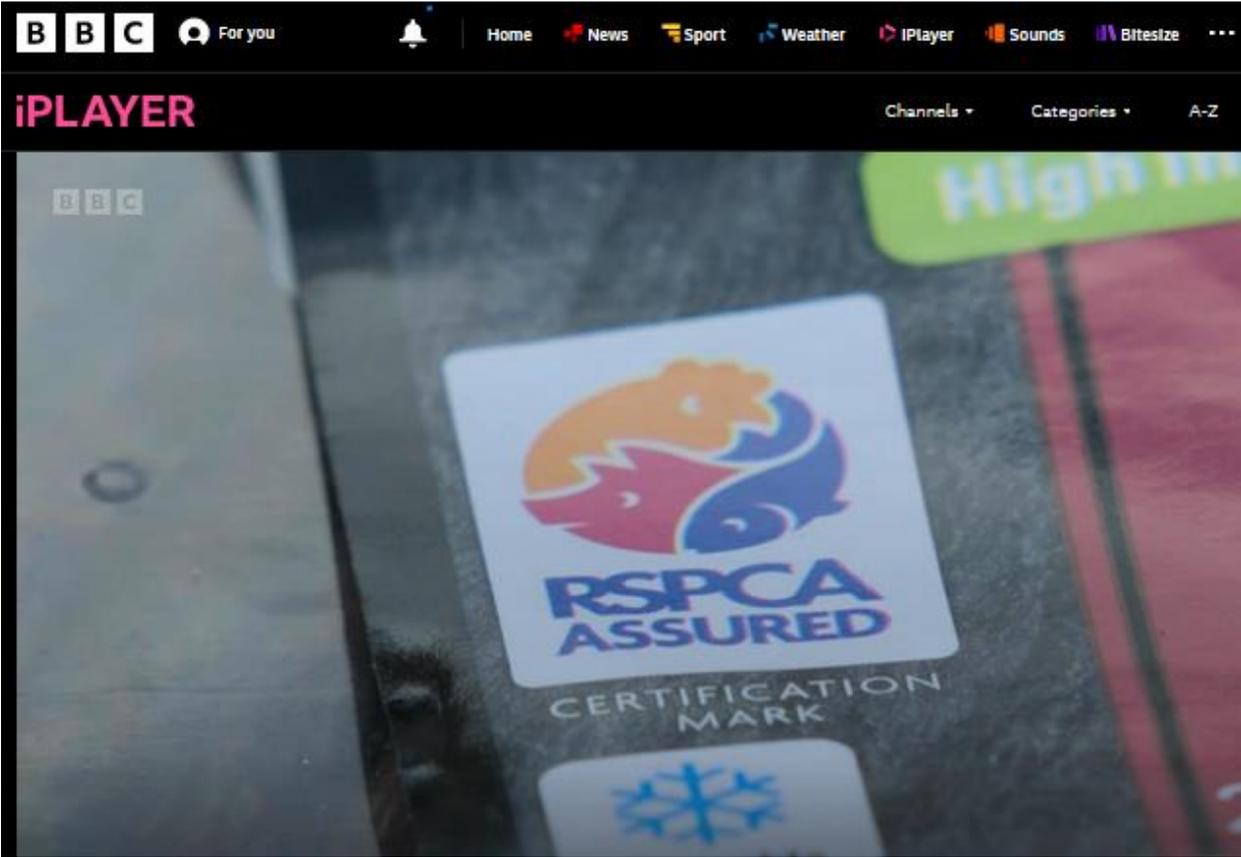
Soaps Reality Love Island Drama Streaming Film

WATCH THE VIDEO

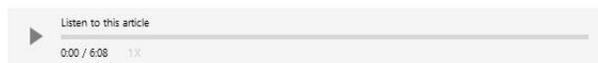
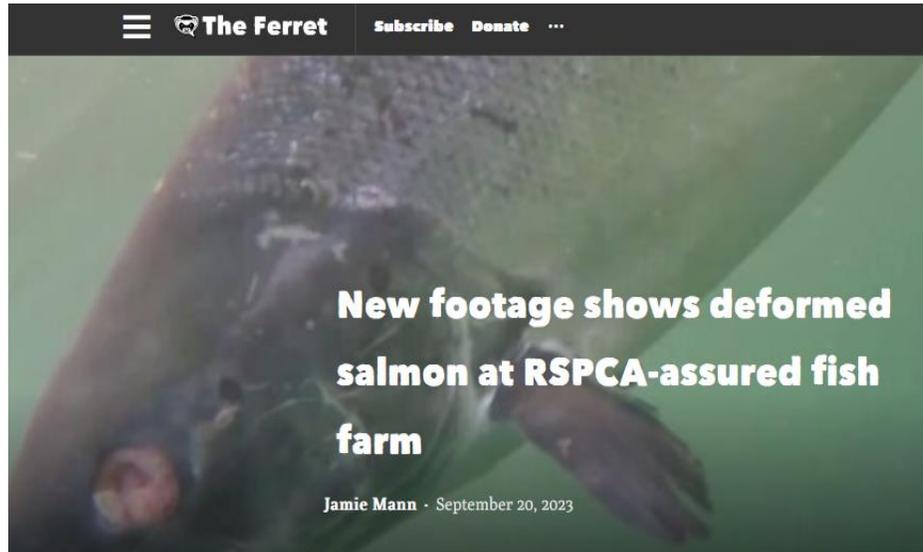
TV
HEAP OF TROUBLE Countryfile fans left ‘sick to their stomach’ by ‘disgusting’ scenes as MILLIONS dying without being eaten

Jill Robinson
Published: 10:17, 11 Sep 2023 | Updated: 10:59, 11 Sep 2023

Watch on BBC Countryfile's feature on salmon farming on iPlayer [online here](#)



The Ferret [reported in September 2023](#):



Newly released video footage shows salmon apparently suffering from deformity and disease at a Highland fish farm certified by leading animal welfare and environmental bodies.

The footage, obtained by the [WildFish](#) conservation charity, was captured in June 2023 at a [salmon farm](#) at Invasion Bay in the Highland area of Ardgour.

The site – owned by the Norwegian fish farming multinational [Mowi](#) – is certified by [RSPCA Assured](#) and the [Aquaculture Stewardship Council](#) (ASC), and registered with the [Soil Association](#).



The footage, which shows salmon with damaged or missing eyes, and chunks of flesh missing, was released alongside a new [WildFish report](#). It alleges serious welfare issues at farms across Scotland, which it claims breach the certifiers' rules.

WildFish [reported in September 2023](#):

Grotesque footage emerges from certified Scottish salmon farm as new report questions whether consumers are being misled by certification bodies and supermarkets



An ASC, Soil Association and RSPCA Assured certified Scottish salmon farm, Mowl, Invasion Bay, June 2023.

A new report from WildFish finds salmon farms are certified by leading bodies despite substantial marine pollution, inadequate parasite control and monthly mortality rates as high as 74%. [1] Recent footage from a certified farm shows salmon suffering from deformity and disease.

Schemes such as [Aquaculture Stewardship Council \(ASC\)](#) and [RSPCA Assured](#) are potentially misleading consumers on the environmental and welfare credentials of certified farmed salmon, the new report finds.

The report, [Responsibly farmed?](#), investigates certification bodies [ASC](#), [RSPCA Assured](#) and [Soil Association Organic](#), and finds numerous examples of how certification of Scottish salmon requires lower environmental and welfare standards than could reasonably be expected by consumers.

For example, RSPCA Assured, which claims to set “*higher farm animal welfare standards*”, specifies no limit on the maximum number or percentage of fish dying on its certified farms. As a result, farmed salmon originating from farms reporting mortality rates as high as 74% can be sold with an RSPCA-assured “high welfare” label in supermarkets across the UK. [2]

The Sunday Mail [reported in September 2023](#):

R News ▸ Scottish News ▸ Sunday Mail

Shock drone footage show thousands of dead fish being hauled out the water at 'zombie' scandal salmon farm

SUNDAY MAIL EXCLUSIVE: Surveillance pictures of the Bakkafrost Scotland farm show large containers packed with lifeless salmon being offloaded.

NEWS By Dawn Thompson
04:30, 24 SEP 2023

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The deaths of thousands of salmon at a controversial [fish farm](#) have been exposed by shocking drone footage.

The images of the RSPCA Assured site off Skye shows thousands of dead fish being extracted from cages for disposal.



Campaigner Don Staniford said the images raise concerns over animal welfare and biosecurity at Bakkafrost Scotland's Portree site.

"Consumers should avoid RSPCA Assured Scottish salmon like the plague. A deadly cocktail of warming water temperatures, swarms of jellyfish, gill problems, infectious diseases, plagues of parasites and toxic algal blooms has killed off millions of Scottish salmon this summer."

The Daily Mail [reported in July 2023](#):

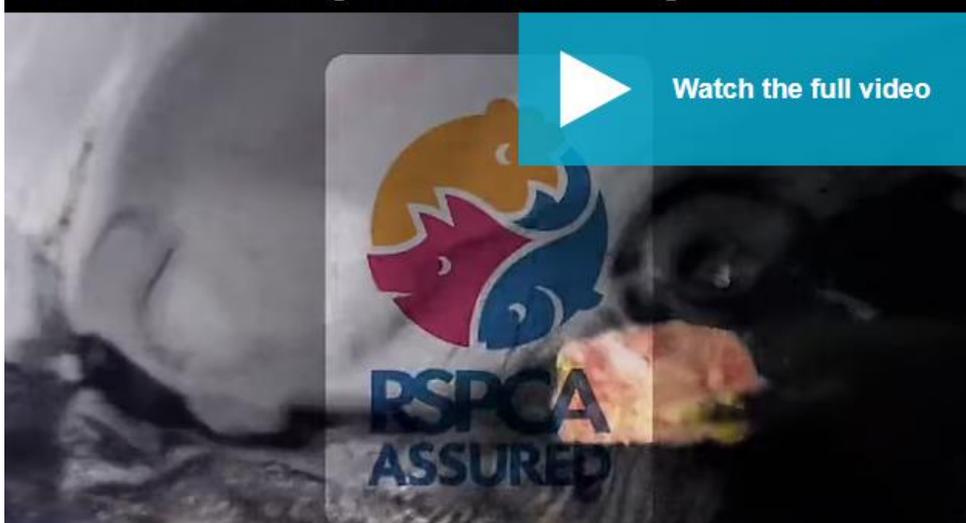
'It's like an X-rated horror film': Welfare probe launched after 'zombie' salmon with huge chunks of flesh missing are filmed at UK fish farm

• The disturbing footage was taken at Bakkafrost Scotland's site on the Isle of Skye

By [ARTHUR PARASHAR](#) and [NATASHA ANDERSON](#)

PUBLISHED: 08:07, 31 July 2023 | UPDATED: 12:15, 31 July 2023

'Zombie' salmon with huge chunks of flesh missing seen in fish farm



The Bakkafrost Scotland representative acknowledged that it has become aware of the footage and noted that a 'recent RSPCA inspection at the site did not flag any issues'.

The RSPCA confirmed that it carried out an in-person visit as soon as it was made aware of the claims and was 'satisfied that the farm was doing everything they could to protect the welfare of both the salmon and any predators'.

The animal welfare organisation told MailOnline: 'The loss of fish lives, and wounded fish, is deeply upsetting and not something anyone wants to happen.'

'We looked into this as soon as it was reported to us, including carrying out an in-person visit. We are satisfied that the farm was doing everything they could to protect the welfare of both the salmon and any predators, such as seals, by trying to prevent any predators from entering the pen, as required by the RSPCA's standards.'

'However, it is a sad reality of salmon farming – as it is with predator attacks on terrestrial livestock for example, foxes attacking free-range hens – that from time to time a determined predator may be able to bypass all effort to exclude them and attack the fish.'



A welfare probe has been launched after 'zombie' salmon with huge chunks of flesh missing were filmed at Bakkafrøst Scotland's Portree fish farm on the Isle of Skye

Metro [reported in July 2023](#):



The RSPCA and RSPCA Assured [reported in April 2022](#) (quoting Sean Black as senior scientific officer of aquaculture): “We have recently started updating our Atlantic salmon standards, and hopefully, they will be published early next year”.



A message from the RSPCA Farm Animals Department

Sean Black, Senior Scientific Officer (Aquaculture)

2022 is already bringing unique challenges to the UK aquaculture industries that are highly concerning for farmers. There will undoubtedly be more challenges as the year goes on, but we appreciate all the hard work being done on farms and in support roles to safeguard and protect fish welfare.

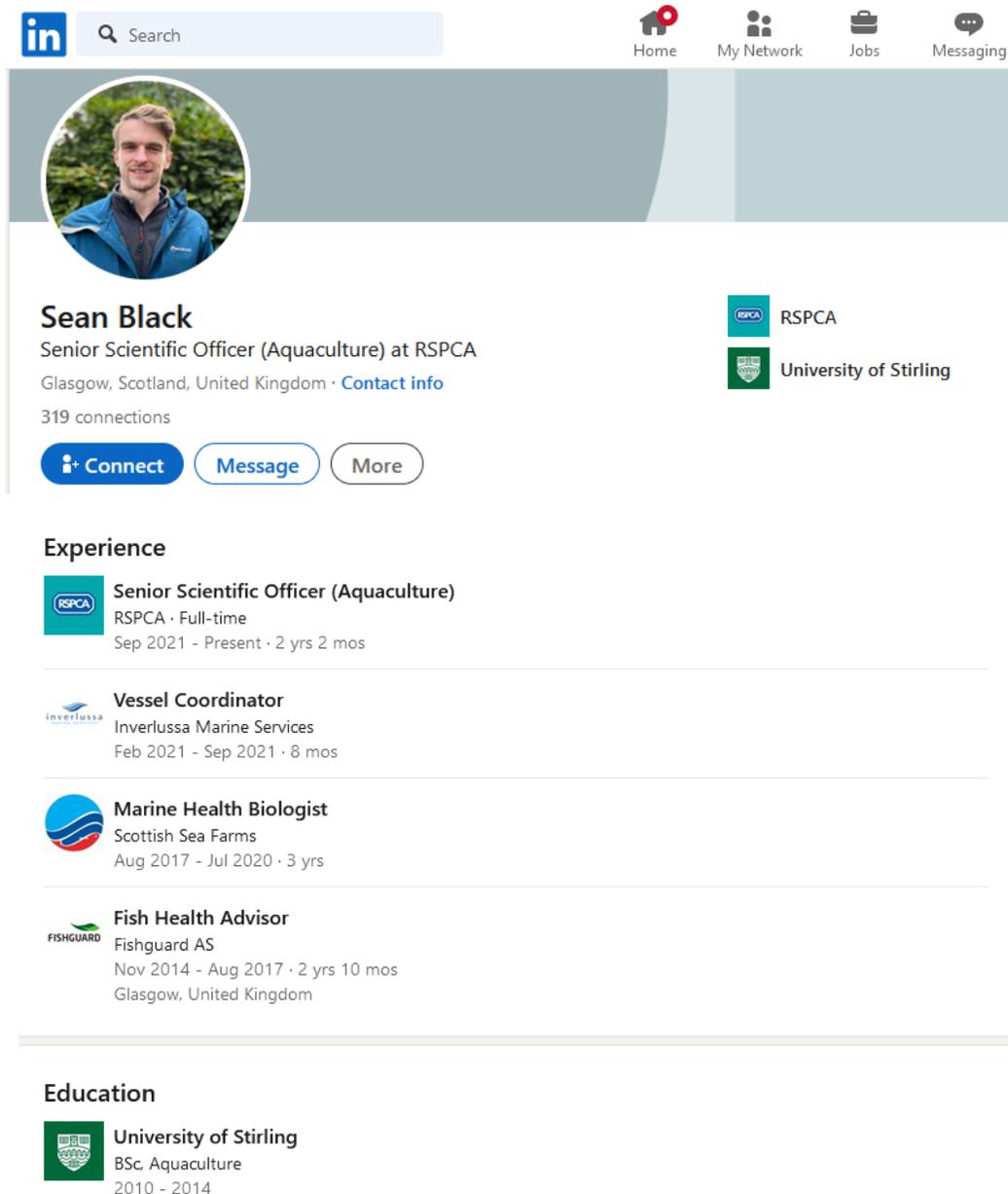
Despite some of the doom and gloom, there continue to be some amazing opportunities for innovation and development. We welcome all of these and look forward to seeing how they progress.

We have recently started updating our Atlantic salmon standards, and hopefully, they will be published early next year. We are always keen to hear the thoughts of the industry and stakeholders, so please [let us know](#) if you want to discuss anything or have any ideas. Our team will be out and about over the summer (while the weather is good, of course!), so we look forward to seeing you on our travels.



The RSPCA's '[Annual Review 2022](#)' stated (p8): "As part of the review of the salmon standards (due for publication in 2023), 277 amendments were made to further improve salmon welfare. These standards cover the entire lives of the fish from eggs through to slaughter, including transport".

Sean Black, [like many RSPCA Assured staff](#), used to work for the salmon farming industry:



Sean Black
Senior Scientific Officer (Aquaculture) at RSPCA
Glasgow, Scotland, United Kingdom · [Contact info](#)
319 connections

[Connect](#) [Message](#) [More](#)

Experience

-  **Senior Scientific Officer (Aquaculture)**
RSPCA · Full-time
Sep 2021 - Present · 2 yrs 2 mos
-  **Vessel Coordinator**
Inverlussa Marine Services
Feb 2021 - Sep 2021 · 8 mos
-  **Marine Health Biologist**
Scottish Sea Farms
Aug 2017 - Jul 2020 · 3 yrs
-  **Fish Health Advisor**
Fishguard AS
Nov 2014 - Aug 2017 · 2 yrs 10 mos
Glasgow, United Kingdom

Education

-  **University of Stirling**
BSc, Aquaculture
2010 - 2014

Dr Ronnie Soutar, Head of Veterinary Services at Scottish Sea Farms (where Sean Black worked from 2017 to 2020), was the [Chair of SSPCA](#) (until he [stepped down in May 2022](#)) presiding over [endemic welfare abuse at salmon farms](#).

Fish Farming Expert [reported in October 2021](#): “All of Scotland’s salmon farmers are allied to RSPCA Assured and are included in the directory apart from Skye farmer Organic Sea Harvest, which is certified by the Soil Association and covered by the Association’s own welfare standards.”

Fish Farming Expert [reported in December 2022](#) that “all of Scotland’s salmon farmers are now members of the RSPCA Assured scheme”.

RSPCA Assured [reported in December 2022](#): “From egg to supermarket shelf, the life of an RSPCA Assured salmon is about three years long. The RSPCA Assured logo can only go on products which have been raised from birth to slaughter (referred to as harvest in salmon farming) to the [RSPCA’s strict higher welfare standards](#)”.

According to [Salmon Scotland’s website](#), “around 70 per cent of Scottish salmon are certified to the RSPCA Farm Assured scheme”:

RSPCA Assured is the RSPCA’s ethical food label dedicated to farm animal welfare. It is a charity and operates totally independently from the food and farming sectors. Their standards are higher than other UK farm assurance schemes in many key welfare areas and recognised by the government as such.

With fish health and welfare at the heart of successful Scottish salmon farming around 70 per cent of Scottish salmon are certified to the RSPCA Farm Assured scheme – a higher percentage than any other UK farming sector. The remaining salmon are reared to the same high welfare standards under other accreditation schemes.

On RSPCA Assured salmon farms, animals must be given enough space to move around, a good diet, be handled carefully to minimise stress and be able exhibit their natural behaviours.

It means that when you see the RSPCA Assured label on fish packaging or on menus you know the farms, and every stage of the animals’ lives, have been assessed to [RSPCA animal welfare standards](#).

Scottish salmon farmers rear their fish to the highest standards, on the basis that fish in their care are capable of feeling pain. That is an underlying reason why the sector takes its welfare responsibility so seriously.

Farm pens in Scotland are stocked at some of the lowest farming densities of all salmon farming countries, at a maximum of 2% and production standards ensure that fish have plenty of room to swim and shoal in clean, oxygen-rich water.

For more information about RSPCA Assured and salmon farming [click here](#).

WildFish [reported in 2017](#):

Neither Freedom Food Limited nor the RSPCA publishes a list of salmon farms in Scotland certified by RSPCA Assured and there are few published metrics that enable an assessment of whether the RSPCA Assured scheme has improved overall husbandry on Scottish fish farms.

The percentage of the Scottish salmon farming industry that is said to be certified by the RSPCA Assured scheme has dropped from 78% in 2012 to 67% in 2015. Data suggests that between 2015 and 2016 a total of 41,130 tonnes of farmed salmon died on Scottish fish farms generally as a result of one or more of fish diseases, infestation with parasites, damage caused by handling, crowding of fish, treatment losses and predation. As 67% of the salmon farming industry is RSPCA Assured, pro rata, this mortality would equate to roughly 27 million fish having died on RSPCA Assured farms between 2015 and 2016. The percentage by weight of mortality as against total production of the Scottish salmon farming industry by weight between 2013 and 2016 has almost doubled from under 7% to almost 14%.

As the wider environmental standards applied as part of the RSPCA Assured certification scheme are not rigorous enough and generally reflect minimum legal requirements only, the RSPCA should urgently review its certification as applied to salmon fish-farms, including improving and making far more stringent those standards in the RSPCA Assured scheme that deal with wider environmental impact and impact on wild fish. It must do this in consultation with wild fish conservation bodies, and demonstrating complete openness in relation to any certification by RSPCA Assured, which must include publishing a full list of all fish-farms certified as RSPCA Assured, to ensure that the RSPCA Assured scheme itself enjoys public confidence.

The WildFish report – [“RSPCA Assured certification of Scottish farmed salmon”](#) - included:

- 3.8 It is claimed by RSPCA Assured that *“unlike other labelling schemes, we are completely independent from the food and farming industries”*⁷.
- 3.9 However, in respect of farmed salmon, members of the RSPCA Salmon (Freshwater) Standards Technical Advisory Group (FW) and RSPCA Salmon (Seawater) Standards Technical Advisory Group (SW), which are both heavily involved in setting the welfare standards applied by RSPCA Assured, are dominated by the salmon farming industry and associated companies, with at least 20 of 24 members of that Group from the industry⁸:

John Avizienius (RSPCA farmed salmon specialist) FW and SW Alasdair MacDonald (The Scottish Salmon Company) FW Andy Young (Cooke Aquaculture) FW and SW Chris Findlay (Fish Vet Group) FW and SW Dave Danson (Landcatch) FW David Cockerill (Marine Harvest) SW David Roadknight (Lochduart) FW George Whyte (Kintail Hatchery) FW Gilpin Bradley (Wester Ross Salmon) FW and SW Grant Cumming (Hjaltland Seafarms Ltd) SW Hugh Murray (Migdale Smolt Ltd) FW Hugh Richards (Wester Ross Salmon) FW and SW Ian Armstrong (Partners in Welfare) FW and SW John Barrington (Scottish Sea Farms) FW and SW John Richmond (Marine Harvest Scotland) FW Jon Walden (Hjaltland Seafarms Ltd) FW Kim Thomas (The Scottish Salmon Company) FW and SW Michelle Johnson (Cooke Aquaculture) FW and SW
--

Nick Joy (Lochduart) FW and SW Paul Armstrong-Wilson (Solway Transport) FW Paul Irving (Meridian Salmon) FW Rob Murray (Howietoun) FW A technical/field operations representative of Freedom Food Ltd FW and SW A representative of RSPCA field staff (Farm Livestock Officers) FW and SW
--

RSPCA Assured charges for certification

- 4.1 In the year to December 2015, Freedom Food Limited made £2.4m, with assurance scheme licence fees and assessments amounting to £2.0 million. Freedom Food Limited's annual report states that 233 million fish benefitted from the scheme in 2015, as against 283 million in 2014⁹. Its expenditure in 2015 was also given as £2.4 million.
- 4.2 67% of Scottish farmed salmon are said to be covered by the RSPCA Assured scheme¹⁰. In 2012, a higher figure of 78% of Scottish salmon was claimed to be farmed to the RSPCA's higher welfare standards¹¹.
- 4.3 It is also important to note that all certified fish farms are charged to be RSPCA Assured. Freedom Food Limited charges a £119 for new membership of the RSPCA Assured scheme, a £486 annual fee per fish farm site and a charge of 0.875p per kg of the value of product sold (gutted weight).
- 4.4 Based upon annual Scottish salmon production figures given in the Scottish Fish Farm Production Survey 2015¹² of 171,722 tonnes in 2015, from 250 seawater sites, these charges imply a total charge levied upon Scottish salmon farming of between £800,000 and £900,000 per year.

Which farms are RSPCA Assured?

- 5.1 Although it would perhaps seem obvious that for a certification scheme of any sort to be able to promote good practice, in whatever field, it must be possible to identify which farms are certified and which are not, in the hope that consumers ensure that purchases are only made from certified farms, there is no published list of certified Scottish salmon farms.
- 5.2 In 2012, Freedom Food Limited declined to provide a list of certified farms stating that *"specific details relating to our members is deemed as confidential within our membership agreement and we are only permitted to release such information if it is deemed to be in the member's interest to do so. Under the circumstances I believe it would be inappropriate for Freedom Food to furnish you with the information you have requested"*¹³.
- 5.3 That appears to remain the position with RSPCA Assured farms. There is no list of certified farms on either the RSPCA or RSPCA Assured websites.
- 5.4 Although the RSPCA Welfare Standards emphasise proper record keeping, documentation relating to farms visits, certification, audits and indeed the identity of particular farms accredited under the RSPCA Assured scheme is not published making the certification of farms under the RSPCA Assured scheme opaque at best.

Criticism of Scottish salmon accredited via RSPCA Assured ([known as Freedom Food before 2015](#)) has been ongoing for over a decade:

Infested fish farm gets RSPCA award

Mark Macaskill

Saturday November 17 2012,
9.37pm, The Sunday Times

Share    

Save 

SALMON farms have been granted an ethical food award by one of Britain's most respected animal welfare charities despite concerns about disease and chemical emissions into the sea.

Farms owned by the Scottish Salmon Company (SSC) — one of Britain's largest producers of farmed salmon — were accredited by the RSPCA's Freedom Food scheme days after government inspectors noted sea lice problems at the sites.

The Atlantic Salmon Trust (AST), of which the Prince of Wales is patron, said sea lice “clouds” could harm passing wild salmon. This weekend the RSPCA defended the scheme, which covers 300m farmed animals in Britain, and insisted it was helping to improve welfare standards.

The charity refuses to publish details of when salmon farms are accredited — citing data protection — but details relating to SSC, which supplies Sainsbury's with its Loch Roag brand of farmed salmon, were inadvertently released to a member of the public earlier this year.

“At the very least, where the farms are shown to be failing to control sea lice, or are causing unacceptable pollution of the seabed, the RSPCA should withdraw its certification,” said Guy Linley-Adams from the Salmon & Trout Association.

In 2002, a Scottish fish farm run by Loch Duart Ltd became the first to earn the Freedom Food endorsement and all of its sites are accredited.

Yet, between 2009 and 2011, 18 of them were red-flagged by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, which monitors marine pollution. It warned potentially toxic emissions were “unsatisfactory” at 13 farms and “borderline” at a further five.

Freedom Foods 'failing to crack down' on poor salmon farming standards

Salmon and Trout Association said farms under the RSPCA's scheme had records of sea lice infestation and pollution

Severin Carrell

@severincarrell

Wed 16 Jan 2013 18:11 GMT



The RSPCA's **Freedom Food** labelling scheme has been accused by anglers of failing to crack down on poor environmental standards at Scottish salmon farms.

The **Salmon and Trout Association**, an influential charity which promotes angling and wild fisheries, said a number of farms accredited under the animal welfare scheme had proven records of high levels of seabed pollution and sea lice infestation, a parasite which has affected scores of Scottish fish farms, yet no action had been taken against them.

Those included sites owned by the **Scottish Salmon Company**, which had been found to have unacceptable seabed pollution levels or failed testing by official agencies, or had sea lice infestation levels which breached best practice guidelines.

Freedom Foods also refused to disclose which fish farms are its members because that information was commercially confident, or how much money it earned from them, which made it very hard for consumers to judge its track record, it said.

The association estimated that Freedom Foods makes up to £1m a year from an annual £463 a year membership fees and from licensing its famous blue logo to producers, imposing a fee for every kilo of fish produced.

Freedom Food scheme 'fig leaf' for farms

Nick Drainey

Thursday January 17 2013,
12.01am, The Times



A food packaging logo aimed at reassuring consumers on good practice has been accused of providing a “fig leaf” for producers who pollute the environment.

The [RSPCA's Freedom Food](#) logo is used on food packaging and by producers to indicate good animal welfare practice, as well as environmental stewardship. But [the Salmon & Trout Association report](#) says that some salmon farms with a dismal record on pollution and parasite control are still granted Freedom Food status.

The RSPCA insisted the scheme was used to “improve the welfare of both the fish and the wildlife surrounding fish farms” and pointed out that the vast majority of salmon farms had a good environmental record.

But Hughie Campbell-Adamson, chairman of the Salmon & Trout Association Scotland, said: “It appears that all too often Freedom Food certification provides a convenient fig leaf for salmon farming companies to deflect legitimate criticism of their wider environmental performance and the damage being caused to wild fish.

“By certifying farms that fail to meet basic environmental standards, the credibility of the RSPCA is at stake and it runs the risk of being charged with hoodwinking supermarkets and their customers. It should drop all environmental standards from Freedom Food certification, concentrating solely on animal welfare issues relating to the farmed fish.

“We urge the big supermarkets to examine the environmental claims associated with Freedom Food certification. Otherwise they in turn will be open to the charge that they are misleading consumers.”



The RSPCA rescues one seal - and condones the killing of many others

George Monbiot



Wed 19 Sep 2018 06.00 BST



632

The animal charity's certification of fish farms knowing that they shoot 'pests' indicates a tragic descent into hypocrisy



Last week, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) [issued a press release](#) about the “incredible story” of Marina, a seal it rescued, that had become trapped under a rock on a beach in south Wales. “Moving a three-tonne boulder presents numerous challenges, but we were able to work with partners to free this seal, before giving her the six months of rehabilitation she so urgently needed.” Marina’s rescue is “testimony to the RSPCA’s tireless commitment to wild animals, and their welfare”.

On the same day, the RSPCA’s head of campaigns, pushed into a corner during an online argument, wrote this: “Seal shooting is not culling it’s about humane pest control.” He was defending the slaughter of seals by Scottish salmon farms.

The contradiction is at first sight incomprehensible. But the organisation has another role alongside rescuing animals such as Marina, which is to assess livestock farms, and award those that meet its standards its RSPCA Assured label. This mark of approval [ensures that](#) “you can feel good about your choice when shopping and eating out”. Of the 280m animals whose production and slaughter it approves every year, [salmon account for](#) 200m. It accredits 63% of Scottish salmon farms.

The RSPCA won’t publish a list of the farms it has approved, citing a “contractual clause in the membership agreement”. But of the 24 people who sit on the advisory group for its assurance scheme (according to the [most recent](#) published list), 20 work for salmon farming companies. These companies include the [four named](#) in an investigation into seal shooting in 2013, by the Global Alliance Against Industrial Aquaculture, as “the worst offenders”.

 **Don Staniford** ✓
@TheGAAIA

All sorts of problems in Loch Erisort for @rspcaassured @MowiScotlandLtd! Data published @marinescotland reveals 117,414 dead lumpfish (49% mortality), lice infestation, Heart & Skeletal Muscle Inflammation, Yersinia (Black Death) & Cardiomyopathy syndrome tinyurl.com/5dahv3d3



 RSPCA Frontline and 7 others

9:45 AM · Jan 12, 2022

 **Don Staniford** ✓
@TheGAAIA

Be Sure to Boycott RSPCA Assured Scottish Salmon! tinyurl.com/srommob Shocking new photos published of Mowi's disease-ridden North Shore feedlot in Loch Erisort @marinescotland @MowiScotlandLtd "visibly moribund fish" & "significant lice damage" @sainsburys @rspcaassured



 @LidlGB and 8 others

5:00 PM · Apr 7, 2020



George Monbiot @GeorgeMonbiot · Mar 31, 2021

...

There are shocking examples in [#Seaspiracy](#) of "conservation" groups collaborating in the destruction of marine life. But in my view the worst of all is [@RSPCA_official](#). It was founded to defend animals. Instead, it endorses mass slaughter by salmon farms.



37 409 929



dominic dyer @domdyer70 · Mar 31, 2021

...

Fair to say RSPCA tried to more tightly regulate animal welfare standards in salmon farming through its RSPCA Assured programme & this significantly reduced seal shooting but I agree it should have opposed all killing from start. We now hope to see end of seal shooting for good



dominic dyer @domdyer70 · Mar 31, 2021

...

In my view George the RSPCA spent more time focusing on welfare standards for salmon than for stopping the shooting seals. But it's fair to say salmon farming is cruel for fish, seals & hugely polluting & RSPCA should have no more dealings with industry at all going forward

1 1 12



Don Staniford @TheGAAIA · Apr 5, 2021

...

From the shocking photographic and video evidence of welfare abuse on [@rspcaassured](#) salmon farms it does not appear that the RSPCA's time was well spent does it?! tinyurl.com/3kzd8fhz [@RSPCAChris](#) [@ChrisGPackham](#) [@onekindtweet](#) [@ciwf](#) [@Animallawyersuk](#) [@philip_ciwf](#) [@salmon_scottish](#)





Mowi Scotland Limited and 7 others

1 3 5



dominic dyer @domdyer70 · Apr 5, 2021

They tried & failed to a large degree

1 1



Don Staniford

@TheGAAIA

If the RSPCA failed then why are they still coining in over £500K per year from certifying Scottish farmed salmon? Surely the RSPCA should ditch the welfare nightmare of salmon farming accreditation whilst they still have some kind of reputation left? ecohustler.com/technology/ope...

6:54 AM · Apr 5, 2021



Don Staniford

@TheGAAIA

RSPCA Assured Mowi Plagued by Mass Mortalities & Infectious Diseases tinyurl.com/yaykxc8d Boycott disease-ridden Scottish salmon treated with antibiotics @MowiScotlandLtd @rspcaassured @sainsburys @LidlGB @AldiUK Enteric Redmouth Disease (Yersiniosis) is like the Black Death!



Ian Blackford and 7 others

8:46 AM · May 27, 2020



RSPCA certification group launches investigation into Scottish salmon farms following activist complaint

Though the campaigner has yet to name the specific sites, RSPCA Assured believes it has identified them from photos and video, and an investigation is now underway.

RELATED NEWS

Mowi has already lost 7 million farmed salmon from Discovery Islands phaseout, with more culls to come

Salmon
18 July 2021 19:28 GMT

20 July 2021 18:57 GMT UPDATED 20 July 2021 19:05 GMT

By [Dominio Welling](#) 

The United Kingdom's Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals' (RSPCA) farm-animal welfare program RSPCA Assured is investigating several Scottish salmon farming sites, following a recent complaint by activist group Scottish Salmon Watch.



MowiLeaks: Gruesome Photos Expose Welfare Nightmare of RSPCA Assured, 'organic' & ASC-certified 'responsible' Scottish Salmon!

Don Staniford

Sea Lice Damage: Destroyed Fish

Uszkodzenie od wszy morskiej: Ryba przeznaczona do zniszczenia



05:09

Video player controls including a play button, a progress bar, and icons for volume, closed captions, subtitles, settings, and full screen. The Vimeo logo is visible in the bottom right corner.



RSPCA Assured Scottish Salmon is Dead in the Water!



Watch on  YouTube



Don Staniford ✓
@TheGAAIA



Video Exclusive: Secret Filming Exposes Horrific Welfare Abuse Inside RSPCA Assured Scottish Salmon Farms! tinyurl.com/3krdb2z2
[@rspcaassured](#) [@scotseafarms](#) [@marksandspencer](#) [@ScottishSPCA](#)
[@APHAgovuk](#) [@ProfCMDwyer](#) [@LynneUSneddon](#) [@ciwf](#)
[@Animallawyersuk](#) [@vivacampaigns](#) [@Ecohustler](#)



Scottish Greens and 9 others

6:32 AM · Jul 11, 2022

'High Welfare' RSPCA-Approved Scottish Salmon Linked To Animal Abuse

Animal Equality filmed on a number of slaughter boats last year when investigating Scottish salmon

BY POLLY FOREMAN 31ST MARCH 2023 2 MINUTES READ



Drone footage of dead salmon at Bakkafrost's Geasgill salmon farm in Loch Na Keal, Isle of Mull

Don Staniford

RSPCA ASSURED

Label Rouge

Quality Approved SCOTTISH SALMON

01:22

A drone shot looking down into a large, dark fishing net filled with salmon. Many of the salmon appear dead and are floating on the surface. A person in a yellow safety vest is visible on a boat at the edge of the net. The video player interface includes a play button, a progress bar at 01:22, and various control icons like volume, closed captions, and settings.

Zombie Salmon: R\$PCA A\$\$ured Welfare Abuse at Bakkafrost Scotland

Don Staniford

RSPCA ASSURED

03:18

A close-up shot of a salmon, possibly dead, with a large, semi-transparent RSPCA ASSURED logo overlaid on its body. The logo features a stylized fish in orange, red, and purple colors. The video player interface includes a play button, a progress bar at 03:18, and control icons like volume, settings, and the Vimeo logo.



Don Staniford
@TheGAAIA

...

Beware of farmed salmon in 'Good Fish' clothing! @mcsuk
@Bluemarinef @CRHClover @ASC_aqua @rspcaassured @seaspiracy
@SSPOsays @ScotlandMowi @scotseafarms @salmon_scottish
[thetimes.co.uk/article/seaspi...](https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/seaspi...)



Sainsbury's and 9 others

9:03 AM · Apr 11, 2021



Don Staniford @TheGAAIA

Impartial?????! The RSPCA's farmed salmon standards were written by salmon farmers; the RSPCA receives over £500K a year from salmon farmers for certification via RSPCA Assured & former salmon farmers have been hired by the RSPCA to police salmon farms.

tinyurl.com/93uzxnau

RSPCA paid over £500,000 to back salmon industry



RSPCA officers engage with industry

From the salmon farms to the RSPCA's offices, the RSPCA's officers are engaged with the industry. Chris Packham, RSPCA's Director of Welfare, said: "We are committed to ensuring the highest standards of welfare for farmed salmon. We work closely with the industry to ensure that our standards are practical and achievable, while still protecting the welfare of the fish. We are proud to be part of the RSPCA's commitment to ensuring the highest standards of welfare for farmed salmon."

RSPCA farmed salmon standards technical advisory groups

Members of the RSPCA Salmon (Freshwater) Standards Technical Advisory Group (FW) and RSPCA Salmon (Seawater) Standards Technical Advisory Group (SW) are selected on the basis of the specific expertise they bring to the groups in different areas of farmed salmon care. Members include:

- Professor James Turnbull of University of Stirling and the Chair of the Advisory Group
- Andy Young (Coastal Aquaculture) FW and SW
- Chris Findlay (Fish Vet Group) FW and SW
- Dave Denson (Landcatch) FW

Former Marine Harvest veteran joins RSPCA to tackle aquaculture welfare

Animal welfare group appoints two new members

RELATED NEWS:

How RSPCA's farmed salmon standards are set

The RSPCA appointed two new members to its Standing to help improve the welfare of fish farmed in the UK.

Former Marine Harvest veteran Ian McIvor joined the RSPCA as a farm livestock officer and will carry out inspections of RSPCA Assured farmed fish producers in Scotland. He will also visit fishing boats in the country.

He was a salmon farm manager for Marine Harvest for 20 years and was aquaculture manager with Young's Seafood for 20 years.

Chris Packham and 8 others

6:45 AM · May 19, 2021



Don Staniford ✓ @TheGAAIA · Dec 7, 2020

There are 500,000 reasons why @RSPCAChris thinks it's OK to certify salmon farms as welfare-friendly tinyurl.com/u3m7nk5



3 6 7



Hampshire Karin ❤️ 🌱 🐼 @KarinKMacDee

CEO Chris Sherwood aka @RSPCAChris might think it's OK but Vice President @ChrisGPackham does not. The photo is a bit misleading.

3:12 PM · Dec 7, 2020



Chris Packham ✓ @ChrisGPackham · Dec 8, 2020

It is indeed . Please read the book I recently wrote with @MeganMcCubbin where we confront the horrors of salmon farming head on .

4 1 6



Don Staniford ✓ @TheGAAIA · Dec 8, 2020

What's the title of your book? Why does @rspcaassured certify farmed salmon as welfare friendly?

2



Video Exclusive: Drone footage catches Norwegian giant Mowi offloading ca. 30 tonnes of RSPCA Assured and ASC - Aquaculture Stewardship Council certified 'responsible' Scottish salmon. Last month at exactly the same spot - Kames Pier near Kilmelford - Scotland's Rural Affairs Secretary Mairi Gougeon unveiled the Scottish Government's 'Vision for Sustainable Aquaculture'!





Don Staniford ✓

@TheGAATA



Please stop greenwashing Scottish salmon - by certifying Scottish salmon as 'responsible' certifiers & supermarkets are sponsoring cruelty, suffering & mass mortalities across Scotland! [@rspcaassured](#) [@ASC_aqua](#) [@SoilAssociation](#) [@ScotlandSalmon](#)



1:16 PM · Oct 4, 2023 · 569 Views



Don Staniford ✓

@TheGAATA



Watch the horror story that is Scottish salmon - as sponsored by [@rspcaassured](#) [@RSPCA_official](#) vimeo.com/862330351
Chris Packham should resign as president of the R\$PCA or pull the plug on the greenwashing of Scottish salmon via R\$PCA A\$\$ured!
thetimes.co.uk/article/rspca-...



9:42 AM · Sep 24, 2023 · 1,148 Views

 **WildFish**
@WildFishCons

Claiming to certify “higher welfare farms”, @rspcaassured actually sets NO limit on the maximum number of fish dying on its certified farms.

Is this really “high welfare”?

Find out more here wildfish.org/latest-news/ce...

[#scottishsalmon](#) [#rspcaassured](#) [#offthetable](#)



8:00 AM · Sep 14, 2023 · 2,215 Views

Protestors will be outside the RSPCA’s head office in Horsham on Halloween (31 October 2023) asking the RSPCA to pull the plug on the horror story that is called RSPCA Assured Scottish salmon:

[End Salmon Farming: Join the Scottish Salmon Boycott - 'Digivan' Tour from London to Edinburgh \(31 October to 6 November\)](#)

More information via [Don Staniford](#) on 07771 541826 (salmonfarmingkills@gmail.com)