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Deadly outbreak: Tons of salmon are dumped on to a lorry at Loch Erisort on Lewis to be transported hundreds of miles for incineration



Criticised: Salmon farming has fuelled fears over the impact on wild stocks. Right, the RSPCA Assured scheme covers Loch Erisort

ment part' in the disappearance of sea trout. Mr Graham-Stewart said that the new Norwegian study, which looked at farm-intensive areas in Norway, Scotland and Ireland, proved that the 'drive for growth of the salmon farming industry at all costs' was a flawed approach

MINISTERS could no longer ignore the pattern of wild fish collapses on West Coast sites near fish farms, he added, and called for tough new legislation to include culls of farmed fish where sea lice numbers have spiralled and urged the industry to shift to a 'closed containment system' that would 'biologically separate' farmed fish from the marine environment.

Unwanted mortalities at salmon farms have long been a problem,

but Marine Scotland Science figures reveal the tonnages of dead fish having to be disposed of has more than doubled in three years, from 10,599 tons in 2013 to a record high of 22,479 tons in 2016. The company that suffered the biggest losses was Marine Harvest, headquartered in Norway, whose mortalities leapt threefold to 7,609 tons between 2013 and 2016.

Latest figures for the months up to June 2017 show another 7,700 tons of dead salmon discarded in Scotland, suggesting that the problem is not going away. Another 552 tons were lost in the outbreak of *pasteurella skyensis* at Loch Erisort, near the village of Keose.

Marine Harvest apologised to local people about the smell of decay in the area and the sight of lorries carrying away dead fish.

Specialist contractors transported the carcasses to an anaerobic digester in the Central Belt, where they were turned into liquid

fertiliser. Residents, meanwhile, took to social media to register their disgust.

'The locals are sick of the stink in the village of Keose,' posted one. 'Can't leave a window open or hang out washing.'

Not all the salmon in Loch Erisort's net cages died during the *pasteurella* outbreak, of course. Some responded to the antibiotics doled out by Marine Harvest's marine veterinarians and those passed fit for human consumption were sold on as normal to supermarkets. In doing so, it should be noted that Marine Harvest has done nothing wrong.

Deadly to fish, *pasteurella skyensis* is, according to all medical research, entirely harmless to humans. Loch Erisort salmon is also vouchsafed by the RSPCA Assured logo, the charity's animal welfare scheme which covers the healthy and humane rearing of livestock, from fish to chicken and

pigs. The RSPCA has had to defend the scheme against suggestions its guidelines are toothless.

What was once considered an expensive delicacy is now a staple of the nation's shopping basket. A whole side of fresh salmon can cost as little as £11 and two salmon steaks around £4, while a 1kg (2.2lb) side of smoked salmon can cost less than £40.

In the 1980s, it would have cost four times as much. Recently, prices have started to creep up again due to a slump in supply caused by disease and sea lice.

The disease known as *pasteurella skyensis* was identified in 2002 and named after a farm on Skye where it was first found, said Marine Harvest's business support manager, Steve Bracken.

He described the Loch Erisort outbreak as 'a localised problem', adding that high bio-security measures had been put in place to

ensure the bacterium did not spread to other sites. 'I think the fact that the fish were weakened by gill disease to begin with has meant that this bacteria could have been around before,' he said at the time.

'We've been here before and we know what can happen, but we also know what we can do to prevent the spread of it.'

Don Staniford, from the Global Alliance Against Industrial Aquaculture, believes the problem is simple: 'We are farming too many salmon in too confined a space.'

THE mortality problem is simply symptomatic of overproduction - we are cramming a migratory species into these cages. There would be a public outcry if a quarter of our chickens or turkeys or cows or sheep were dying each year, but that is the case with salmon farming.'

He urged the inquiry to consider imposing a moratorium on new farms, but said: 'There is a real risk it could be a whitewash because of the importance of the salmon farming industry to the Scottish economy.'

For the industry, such talk is unjustified hyperbole, although it would not dispute its status as a commercial success story producing nearly 180,000 tons of salmon by 2015.

Scott Landsburgh, chief executive of the Scottish Salmon Producers' Organisation, said: 'The reality is we do have sporadic, localised, outbreaks of disease resulting in higher mortality rates than we would wish, we absolutely concede that.'

'But the idea that the whole industry is having this wholesale problem and is not being able to deal with it and it's only on account of bad farming practices is, quite

TURN TO NEXT PAGE