

Scottish Salmon Watch, 2 February 2020



### Welfare Abuse on Scottish Salmon Farms

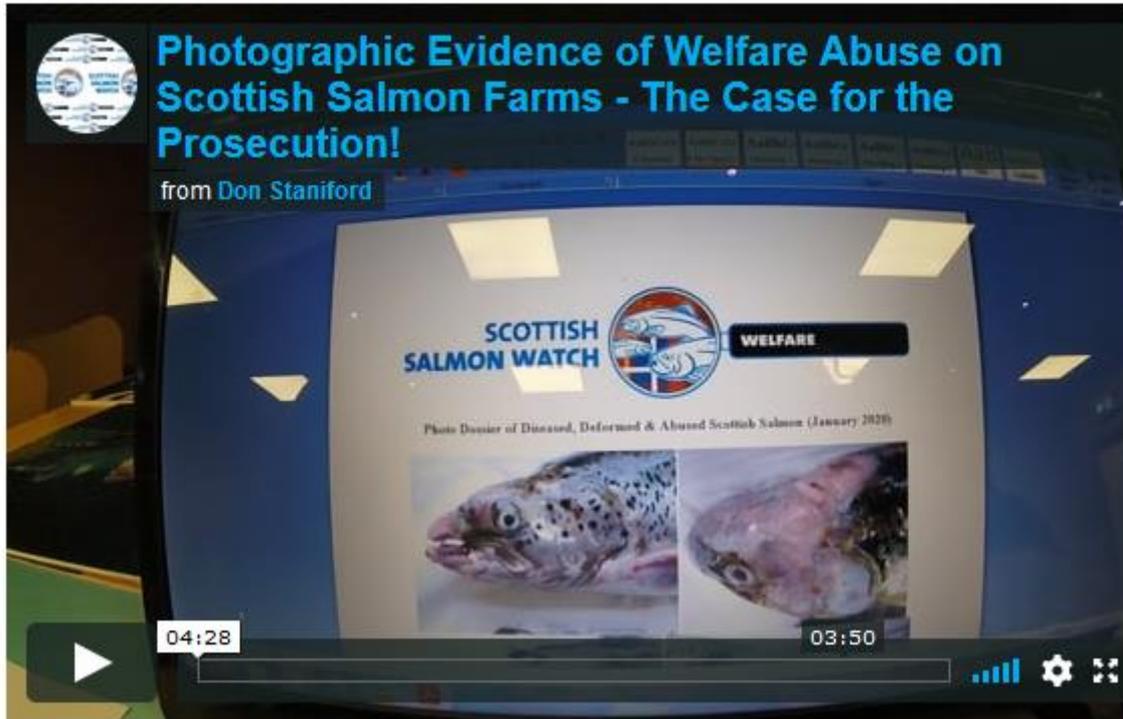
- **Scottish scientist calls for a ban on the 'Thermolicer' & says Scottish salmon should not be certified as 'welfare friendly' by RSCPA Assured**
- **"It's pretty gruesome stuff...this is heavy duty suffering...horrifying...totally unacceptable" says Dr. Lynne Sneddon in video interview**
- **Legal action against Scottish Ministers & salmon farming companies**

A leading scientific expert on fish welfare backs calls for a ban on the 'Thermolicer' and believes that welfare abuse is so widespread it calls into question the certification of 70% of salmon farming in Scotland as 'welfare-friendly' via RSPCA Assured. This month Scottish Salmon Watch launched a fund-raising drive to instruct [Advocates for Animals](#) to act for them in legal action against salmon farming companies for breaches of the Animal Health & Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 and against Scottish Ministers for failing to properly police welfare legislation.

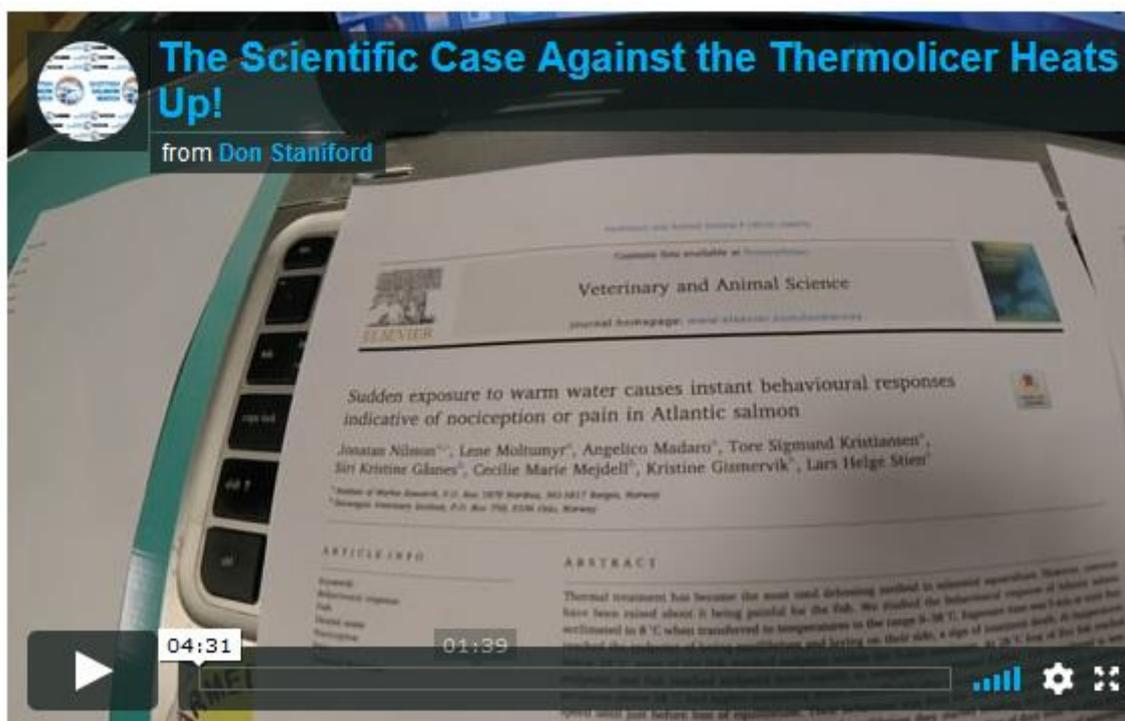
In an exclusive interview with Scottish Salmon Watch, [Dr. Lynne Sneddon \(Director of Bioveterinary Science at the University of Liverpool\)](#) [1], said:

"These fish are obviously damaged so they will be in pain and quite frankly this would not be acceptable in pig, sheep or cow farms. 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. So really these fish should be removed at the first sign of illness and humanely killed to safeguard their welfare."





"Looking at the empirical evidence and these surveys which have shown mortalities are highest after these heat treatments I do not think they should be used," [continued Scottish born Dr. Sneddon \(who discovered fish feel pain during her postdoctoral research at the Roslin Institute in 2003\)](#). I think they shouldn't be allowed because they are causing pain and distress to these animals, mortality afterwards, they cause tissue damage. Basically this would not be allowed if this was a cow, sheep, pig or a chicken. We not put them in scolding hot water that causes them pain to treat them. And so I believe this is an inhumane way of dealing with lice and should not be allowed."



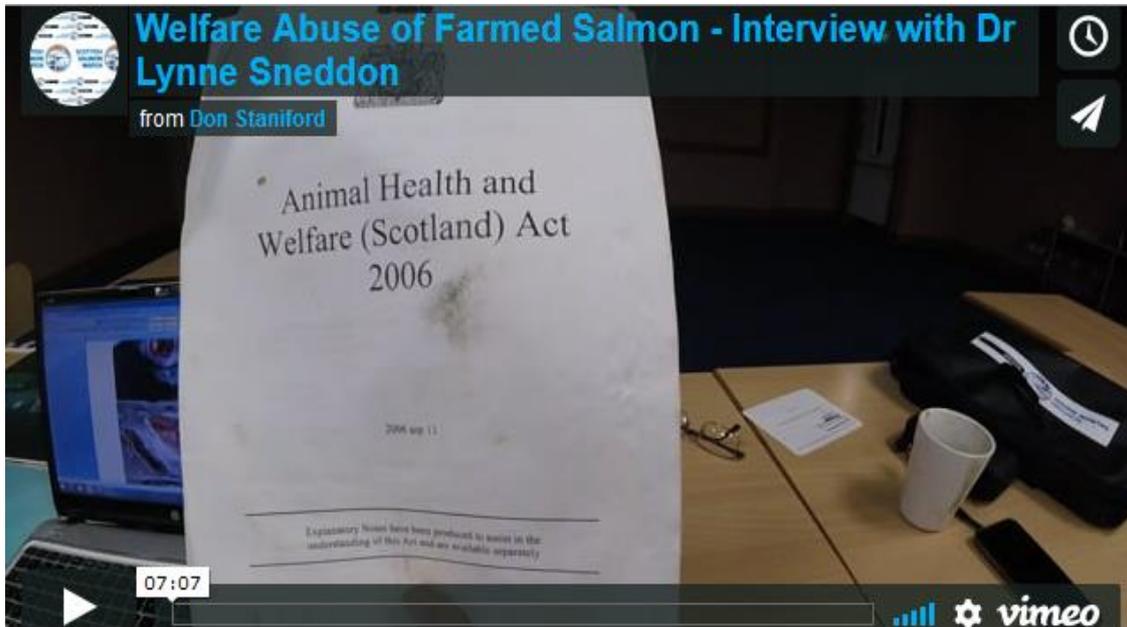
In response to a ['Photo Dossier of Diseased, Deformed & Abused Scottish Salmon'](#), [Dr Sneddon commented:](#)



"The fish here have a lot of lesions, ulcers, damage due to sea lice, eye damage. Really, these fish should never have been allowed to get to this stage. The minute they show signs of illness they should be removed and humanely killed. It would suggest that these animals have been allowed to persist and suffer for a long time. The skin of the fish is covered in nociceptive nerves which detect potentially painful stimuli so the damage caused by these sea lice will be painful. And it also leaves the fish open to secondary infections from other pathogens so it is highly likely that the body will be invaded by other diseases."



"Because it is hidden under the water the public aren't aware of these issues," [continued Dr. Sneddon](#) ([author of a 2019 scientific paper published by the Royal Society](#)). "They don't know the real truth about salmon farming and the extent of the mortalities and the extent of disease. I think if they knew there would be a massive outcry at the state of these animals and it just wouldn't be allowed."



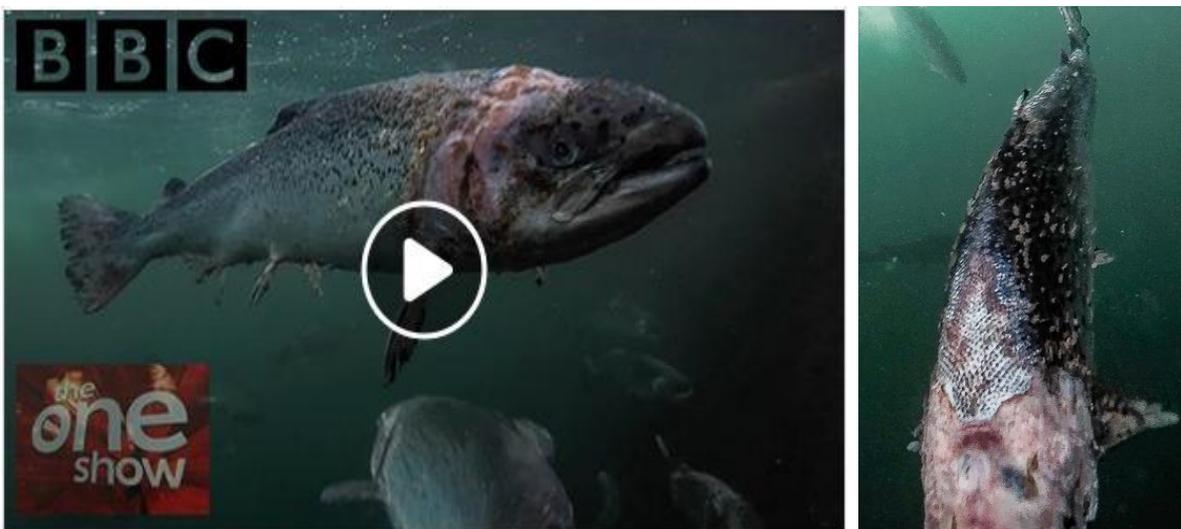
"It's all about money really - they want to make as much money as possible from these salmon," [said Dr. Sneddon](#), [a graduate from the University of Glasgow](#). "And so in effect they will allow them to persist in the hope that when they harvest them these lesions aren't seen when they fillet them and prepare them. These lesions starts as very small either bacterial infections or fungal infections or damage to the skin. The extent of these lesions means that these fish have had this problem for a very long time."



"When we look at these photos which have been released from the Government we can see these animals are in a terrible state and I would say this is totally unacceptable," [continued Dr. Sneddon](#). "These animals should have been removed and humanely killed well before they got into this situation. We would never ever allow this in a laboratory. In a laboratory aquarium we have very strict legislation. Any animal showing signs of ill health which impairs their welfare are killed humanely immediately, they're euthenased. And you would never get this in a public aquarium either - we would never have fish in this state. The fact is that Scottish farming is allowing fish to persist in with diseases, lesions. This is just not acceptable. So if you were to interpret the Animal Welfare Act that there is a duty of care, that they have to have responsibility, we should have really basically got these fish out and euthenased them at the first sign of ill health. It's pretty gruesome stuff. And again I would say that they should have never have got to this stage. This is heavy duty suffering."



"The state of this fish is horrifying," [said Dr. Sneddon](#) commenting on shocking evidence of suffering salmon at the Scottish Salmon Company's Vacasay farm in Loch Roag [obtained by photographer Corin Smith](#) and [broadcast on the BBC One Show](#). "If this was a terrestrial animal - a farmed animal such as a cow, pig, sheep, chicken - there would be a public outcry. This would not be allowed. But because salmon are farmed under the water then all of this is hidden. I think really that these fish should not be allowed to live in this kind of state."



When asked whether farmed salmon in such a state should be certified via [RSPCA Assured](#) (as is the case for ca. 70% of Scottish salmon farming production), [Dr. Sneddon](#) replied:

"Well, I've never ever been an RSPCA certifier. Personally, in my own opinion as a scientist, 'no' is the answer. I would not say this is a welfare friendly practice."

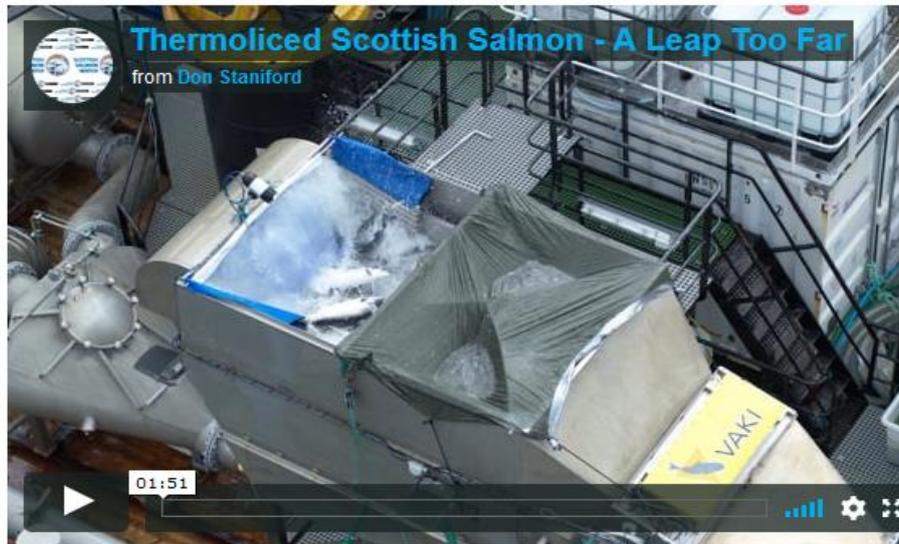


Don Staniford, Director of [Scottish Salmon Watch](#), said:

"It is painfully obvious that salmon are suffering from serious and systematic abuse both on factory farms and via mechanical treatments such as the Thermolicer. There is a huge disconnect between the marketing of Scottish salmon as 'healthy', 'responsibly sourced' and 'welfare friendly' via RSPCA Assured and the gruesome images of welfare abuse on salmon farms. Scientific evidence surely dictates an immediate ban on mechanical treatments such as the Thermolicer. The damning photographic evidence graphically illustrates unnecessary suffering, pain and widespread welfare problems on Scottish salmon farms. Scottish Ministers are clearly failing to police the welfare nightmare that is salmon farming. Offenders must be prosecuted as a matter of urgency to end the torture and suffering."



Watch video footage of a Thermolicer in action on a Mowi salmon farm [certified by RSPCA Assured](#) in Loch Leven [online here](#)



Eddie Bowles, a solicitor with [Advocates for Animals](#), said:

"From the photographic evidence it appears that there is a strong legal case to answer. Farmed salmon are afforded protection from 'Unnecessary Suffering' under the Animal Health & Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006. The photographs we have seen indicate systemic and obvious pain and suffering. Welfare standards on salmon farms need to be improved in order to comply with the law."

Read more via:

[Photo Dossier of Diseased, Deformed & Abused Scottish Salmon](#) (February 2020)

[Media Backgrounder: The Welfare Nightmare of Scottish Salmon](#) (February 2020)

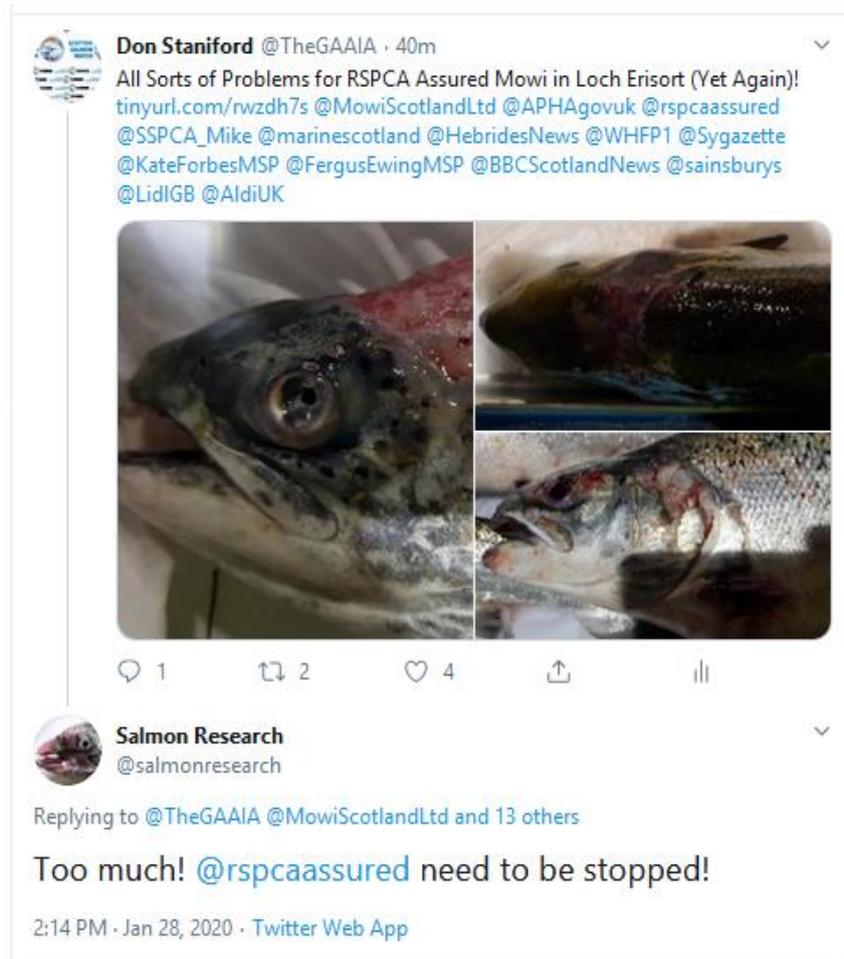
[Photo Dossier of Diseased, Deformed & Abused Scottish Salmon](#) (February 2020)



[Media Backgrounder: The Welfare Nightmare of Scottish Salmon](#) (February 2020)



Next month (23 March) Scottish Salmon Watch will be attending a ['Focus on Fish' workshop hosted by the RSPCA at the University of Edinburgh](#) [2].



Read more background on the RSPCA's certification of ca. 70% of Scottish salmon farming production as 'welfare-friendly' by RSPCA Assured (formerly Freedom Food) via: "[New report estimates that Scottish salmon farming mortalities are now running at 20 million fish a year despite 2/3rds of the industry being certified as RSPCA Assured](#)"

Andrew Graham-Stewart, Director of S&TC Scotland, said:

*"There is no doubt that the RSPCA Assured logo on packets of Scottish farmed salmon is intended to persuade supermarket customers that what they are buying is consistently reared with high standards of animal husbandry and protection for the wider marine environment.*

*The shocking level of mortalities apparent across the industry, including on RSPCA Assured farms, casts severe doubt on whether RSPCA Assured is much more than a fig leaf, both in terms of the welfare of the farmed fish and the wider environmental performance of the fish farming industry.*

*We fear that consumers are left in the dark both about the welfare of the farmed salmon, but also about the environmental impact of the fish farms producing these fish."*

## Contact:

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## Notes to Editors:

[1]



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[Lsneddon@liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:Lsneddon@liverpool.ac.uk) [The Fish Indicators of Stress and Health \(F.I.S.H.\)](#)  
web site providing information on fish welfare

Published:  
**September 25,  
2019**

## Fish experience pain with 'striking similarity' to mammals

**Dr Lynne Sneddon**, a biologist and one of the world's leading experts on fish pain, said: "When subject to a potentially painful event fishes show adverse changes in behaviour such as suspension of feeding and reduced activity, which are prevented when a pain-relieving drug is provided.

"When the fish's lips are given a painful stimulus they rub the mouth against the side of the tank much like we rub our toe when we stub it.

"If we accept fish experience pain, then this has important implications for how we treat them. Care should be taken when handling fish to avoid damaging their sensitive skin and they should be humanely caught and killed."

The paper is published as part of 'Evolution of mechanisms and behaviour important for pain' – the latest theme issue of Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B that includes over a dozen articles on pain.

### Research reference:

Sneddon Lynne U, Evolution of nociception and pain: evidence from fish models, 374, *Phil. Trans. R. Soc. B*, <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2019.0290>

## Publications



### Evolution of nociception and pain: evidence from fish models **(Journal article)**

Sneddon, L. U. (2019). *Evolution of nociception and pain: evidence from fish models*. *PHILOSOPHICAL TRANSACTIONS OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY B-BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES*, 374(1785).

doi:10.1098/rstb.2019.0290

**DOI: [10.1098/rstb.2019.0290](https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2019.0290)**

### Fish sentience denial: Muddying the waters **(Journal article)**

Sneddon, L. U., Lopez-Luna, J., Wolfenden, D., Leach, M., Valentim, A., Steenbergen, P., . . . Brown, C. (2018). *Fish sentience denial: Muddying the waters*. *Animal Sentience*, 21(1).

### Welfare considerations in non-mammalian animals: Pain in fish **(Chapter)**

Sneddon, L. U. (2016). *Welfare considerations in non-mammalian animals: Pain in fish*. In K. L. Matignon (Ed.), *Révolutions animales Comment les animaux sont devenus intelligents* (pp. 210-213). France: Les liens qui libèrent.

### Pain in Aquatic Animals **(Journal article)**

Sneddon, L. (2015). *Pain in Aquatic Animals*. *The Journal of Experimental Biology (JEB)*, 218, 967-976.

doi:10.1242/jeb.088823

**DOI: [10.1242/jeb.088823](https://doi.org/10.1242/jeb.088823)**

### DO PAINFUL SENSATIONS AND FEAR EXIST IN FISH? **(Chapter)**

Sneddon, L. (2013). *DO PAINFUL SENSATIONS AND FEAR EXIST IN FISH?*. In *Animal Suffering: From Science to Law, International Symposium* (pp. 93-112). Carswell.

### SENSORY SYSTEMS, PERCEPTION, AND LEARNING | Nociception or Pain in Fish **(Chapter)**

Sneddon, L. U. (2011). *SENSORY SYSTEMS, PERCEPTION, AND LEARNING | Nociception or Pain in Fish*. In *Encyclopedia of Fish Physiology* (pp. 713-719). Elsevier. doi:10.1016/b978-0-12-374553-8.00083-6

**DOI: [10.1016/b978-0-12-374553-8.00083-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-0-12-374553-8.00083-6)**

## **Pain Perception in Fish Evidence and Implications for the Use of Fish (Journal article)**

Sneddon, L. U. (2011). *Pain Perception in Fish Evidence and Implications for the Use of Fish*. *JOURNAL OF CONSCIOUSNESS STUDIES*, 18(9-10), 209-229. Retrieved from <http://gateway.webofknowledge.com/>

## **Nociception or Pain in Fish (Chapter)**

Sneddon, L. (2011). *Nociception or Pain in Fish*. In *Encyclopedia of Fish Physiology: From Genome to Environment* (pp. 713-719). Elsevier.

## **Pain Perception in Fish: Indicators and Endpoints (Journal article)**

Sneddon, L. U. (2009). *Pain Perception in Fish: Indicators and Endpoints*. *ILAR JOURNAL*, 50(4), 338-342. doi:10.1093/ilar.50.4.338

**DOI: 10.1093/ilar.50.4.338**

## **Pain and Fear in Fish (Chapter)**

Ashley, P. J., & Sneddon, L. U. (n.d.). *Pain and Fear in Fish*. In *Fish Welfare* (pp. 49-77). Blackwell Publishing Ltd. doi:10.1002/9780470697610.ch4

**DOI: 10.1002/9780470697610.ch4**

## **The sentience of fish and the implications for farming, fisheries and sport (Report)**

Sneddon, L. U. (2008). *The sentience of fish and the implications for farming, fisheries and sport*. Surrey: CIWF. Retrieved from <http://www.ciwf.org.uk/about/index.html>

## **Ethics and welfare: Pain perception in fish. (Journal article)**

Sneddon, L. U. (2006). *Ethics and welfare: Pain perception in fish.. Bull. Eur. Assoc. Fish. Pathol.*, 26, 7-11.

## **Fish behaviour and welfare (Journal article)**

Sneddon, L. U. (2007). *Fish behaviour and welfare*. *APPLIED ANIMAL BEHAVIOUR SCIENCE*, 104(3-4), 173-175. doi:10.1016/j.applanim.2006.09.006

**DOI: 10.1016/j.applanim.2006.09.006**

## **Pain in fish (Journal article)**

Sneddon, L. U. (2005). *Pain in fish*. *Fish Farmer*, ?.

## **Do fishes have nociceptors? Evidence for the evolution of a vertebrate sensory system (Journal article)**

Sneddon, L. U., Braithwaite, V. A., & Gentle, M. J. (2003). *Do fishes have nociceptors? Evidence for the evolution of a vertebrate sensory system*. *PROCEEDINGS OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY B-BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES*, 270(1520), 1115-1121. doi:10.1098/rspb.2003.2349

**DOI: 10.1098/rspb.2003.2349**

## **The evidence for pain in fish: the use of morphine as an analgesic (Journal article)**

Sneddon, L. U. (2003). *The evidence for pain in fish: the use of morphine as an analgesic*. *APPLIED ANIMAL BEHAVIOUR SCIENCE*, 83(2), 153-162. doi:10.1016/S0168-1591(03)00113-8

**DOI: 10.1016/S0168-1591(03)00113-8**

[2] Next month (23 March 2020) [the RSPCA hosts a 'Focus on Fish' Workshop at the University of Edinburgh](#):

## Focus on Fish



23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020

The University of Edinburgh

### What are the aims of this meeting and who should attend?

This meeting aims to bring together those involved in the care, use and regulation of fish in research and testing to explore the topic of the welfare of fish used in scientific research. In particular, this meeting will focus on efforts to reduce suffering, with an emphasis on general refinements, welfare assessment, and humane endpoints.

Delegates will be able to share experience and expertise and will take away practical recommendations and action points for applying refinements.



A screenshot of a tweet from the account 'RSPCA - Lab Animals' (@RSPCA\_LabAnimal), dated Jan 24. The tweet text reads: 'Now less than two months until our meeting on welfare, #refinements and humane endpoints for laboratory fish @EdinburghUni on 23 March (the day before #AST2020). Register for your free place now! [rspca.org.uk/webContent/sta...](https://rspca.org.uk/webContent/sta...)'. Below the text are three fish emojis and the hashtags #AnimalWelfare #3Rs #zebrafish. The tweet includes a photograph of a zebrafish (Danio rerio) with its characteristic blue and yellow stripes. At the bottom of the tweet, there are icons for replies (1), retweets (7), likes (8), and a share icon.



**Don Staniford**  
@TheGAAIA

Replying to @RSPCA\_LabAnimal and @EdinburghUni

Please ask your colleagues @rspcaassured to refine their humane endpoints for farmed salmon. Surely this level of cruelty & abuse (on farms certified by RSPCA Assured) must come to an end? [tinyurl.com/y6xtwmza](https://tinyurl.com/y6xtwmza)  
[@onekindtweet](#) [@ciwf](#) [@HSIUKorg](#) [@PETAUK](#)  
[@MowiScotlandLtd](#) [@APHAgovuk](#)



Photos: Scottish salmon from Mow's Staligh Island farm in Loch Eyre

1:13 PM · Jan 24, 2020 · Twitter Web App



Where to buy ▾ Farm animal welfare ▾ Recipes ▾ News ▾ Seasonals ▾ Take action ▾

## Key farmed fish welfare problems and how RSPCA Assured helps

Home > Farm animal welfare > **Salmon and trout**

1 of 2 pages

**Water quality, handling procedures, stocking density, and the way fish are transported and slaughtered can have a big impact on their welfare.**

It can be stressful for farmed fish when they're handled and removed from water when they're being vaccinated or graded according to their size.

### What makes RSPCA Assured different?

The RSPCA welfare standards for salmon and trout - which must be met for fish to be labelled RSPCA Assured - ensure the fish are healthier and less stressed.

The standards require good water quality and careful handling procedures which ensure the health and welfare of the fish.



The RSPCA welfare standards cover all aspects of the fish's lives, including health, diet, environment, care and handling.

RSPCA Assured assessors and the RSPCA's farm livestock officers check that the RSPCA welfare standards are being met.

The RSPCA Assured label makes it easy to recognise products from animals that have had a better life.

### Potential farmed fish welfare issues:

- Poor environment, handling, diet, health, transport and slaughter

RSPCA welfare standards are designed to ensure fish are healthier and less stressed

Read more via ["The Faces of Scottish Salmon - the Ugly Truth Exposed"](#) (February 2020)



More background via:

[2020 Vision for Scottish Salmon](#)

[The Case Against Scottish Salmon](#)

["Responsibly Sourced" Are supermarkets facing a crisis of credibility?](#)

[Health Warnings for Farmed Salmon - Supermarkets Challenged to Introduce Plain Packaging Like Tobacco!](#)

[Salmon farming firm under fire over fish welfare after 700,000 deaths](#)

[EXPOSED: Photo Disclosures Opens Floodgates to More Diseased & Deformed Scottish Salmon](#)

[Welfare Abuse at Scottish salmon farms - Why No Legal Enforcement or Prosecutions?](#)

['Sick' salmon film prompts government probe into Scottish fish farm](#)

[The Sorry State of Scottish Salmon Farming in 2018](#)

[Dirty Secrets Lurking Under Scottish Salmon's Lice Skirt](#)

[Named: supermarkets selling salmon from 'poor' welfare farms](#)

[Legal Complaint Vs Breaches of Animal Health & Welfare \(Scotland\) Act](#)

[Horror photos of farmed salmon spark legal threat](#)

[Scottish Salmon Farming 101](#)

[25 Reasons to Boycott Scottish Salmon](#)

[New report estimates that Scottish salmon farming mortalities are now running at 20 million fish a year despite 2/3rds of the industry being certified as RSPCA Assured](#)

[RSPCA Assured certification of Scottish farmed salmon](#)

[Freedom Foods 'failing to crack down' on poor salmon farming standards](#)