

Salmon industry toxins soar by 1,000%

Mark Macaskill

THE use of toxic chemicals to fight sea lice on Scottish salmon farms has soared by almost 1,000% in the past decade, according to official data that has sparked fresh criticism of the billion-pound industry.

From 2006 to 2016, farmed salmon production increased by 35% while the use of chemicals to control flesh-eating lice rose 932%.

They included compounds that have been linked to reduced fertility in wild salmon and mortality in shellfish such as lobsters.

Critics of salmon farming said this weekend that the growing use of chemicals to fight sea lice, a parasite that kills millions of farmed fish every year, raises serious questions about the industry's environmental impact.

It has rekindled calls for some of Britain's leading supermarkets to ban the sale of farmed salmon from parts of Scotland where "rampant" sea lice infestations pose a threat to the survival of wild salmon and sea trout.

"Scottish salmon farming is fighting a losing battle against chemically resistant sea lice," said Don Staniford of the Global Alliance Against Industrial Aquaculture. "The drugs don't work any more. Sadly, Scotland's lobsters and other shellfish are collateral damage in the salmon farming industry's war on sea lice."

Analysis of data held by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (Sepa), show that Scottish salmon farms used 45kg of

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to turn as scientists at the National Physical Laboratory Amelia James, who said she was glad to see an end to 2016. Year to all, including to my many enemies." using laptop

Soar in use of anti-lice drugs

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chemicals in 2006 but this increased to 467kg in 2016.

Since 2002, salmon farmers have carried out almost 8,500 separate chemical treatments with nearly four tonnes of chemicals dumped into the seas around Scotland.

The treatments used by Scottish salmon farms included cypermethrin, a pesticide that was abandoned in 2012 after sea-lice developed resistance. Scientific studies have suggested that it impairs fertility in wild salmon.

Sepa records show that just over two tonnes of azamethiphos, an active ingredient in Salmosan, a popular delousing pesticide, has been used in the past decade by salmon farmers. A paper published last month by scientists in Canada raised concern that azamethiphos poses a serious health risk to marine wildlife; tests on lobsters found repeated exposure can impair the nervous system and cause death.

However, Scott Landsburgh, chief executive of Scottish Salmon Producers' Organisation, the industry's umbrella body, said all medicines were applied under

strict supervision and monitored closely by Sepa.

"Farmed salmon production has been higher in some years since 2002 and medicine amounts have responded accordingly. Salmon farmers use safe and fully approved veterinary medicines to support fish health. All medicines are applied under strict veterinary supervision and application is tightly regulated with Sepa's official consent."

Efforts are underway to reduce the use of chemicals to control sea lice, which can cause serious fin damage, skin erosion and deep, open wounds that are prone to infection.

Scottish Sea Farms, one of the country's leading producers of farmed salmon, recently bought a Thermo-licer, a £4m delousing device. Fish are pumped into the machine and pass through heated water that kills lice.

Dr Ralph Bickerdike, SSF head of fish health, said last month: "This has been a real breakthrough in the fight against sea lice - having access to a new tool, which works in a completely different way to our other control measures, is a significant

achievement for the Scottish industry."

There are hopes that the method could help reduce the millions of fish that perish annually during factory farming.

The industry is also under pressure from campaigners who are lobbying supermarkets to take tougher action against salmon farms where lice infestations are high.

In the run up to Christmas, Salmon and Trout Conservation Scotland challenged Co-Op and Sainsbury's to stop selling Scottish farmed salmon from regions in the west Highlands and Islands where sea lice infestation is "rampant".

A spokesman for Sepa said the agency imposes limits on the amounts of chemicals or medicines used by fish farmers. He added: "For substances such as sea louse medicines used by fish farmers, Sepa aims to ensure that non-target animals such as shellfish are protected beyond the footprint of the fish farm. Where we find evidence that the conditions controlling medicine use have been breached, then this will be dealt with in accordance with our enforcement policy."

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