

# Newsreel

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## Fears grow over Ireland's "mega" salmon farms

With Ireland's state conservation and aquaculture agencies in conflict over a major Galway Bay development, and with many more west-coast farms planned, anglers must act now to protect their wild fisheries



Protestors marching on the constituency office of Simon Coveney, minister for the marine, at Carriagline, Co Cork on December 15.

THE PUBLIC consultation on the proposed deep-sea fish farm at Inis Oirr in Galway Bay closed in December with the submission of a raft of highly critical appraisals of the Environmental Impact Statement prepared by Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM) – the state agency responsible for developing aquaculture in Ireland.

In its submission, the Board of Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI), the state agency responsible for the conservation of Ireland's wild fisheries, says that BIM fails to adequately acknowledge the impact of sea-lice, which are endemic to salmon farms, on migrating salmonids.

Recent peer-reviewed scientific literature has shown that sea lice account for up to 39 per cent of wild salmon mortalities.

The Galway Bay farm would be the

biggest of its kind in Europe and BIM has identified some 45 further sites for possible aquaculture development.

Anglers and conservationists have formed a protest group called No Salmon Farms At Sea ([www.nosalmonfarmsatsea.com](http://www.nosalmonfarmsatsea.com)). It is concerned that if the "mega" farm in Galway Bay gets the go-ahead, many more applications will be submitted for operating licences all along the north-west, west and south-west coast of Ireland. There are great fears that the west coast of Ireland will suffer the same fate as the west coast of Scotland, where salmonid stocks have been devastated since the arrival of large-scale aquaculture.

In Northern Ireland, a recent contract signed by Glenarm Salmon Farms to supply farmed salmon to

China is also a major cause for concern. Damien O'Brien, co-founder of NSFAS, said: "NSFAS views Galway Bay as a testing ground for the government."

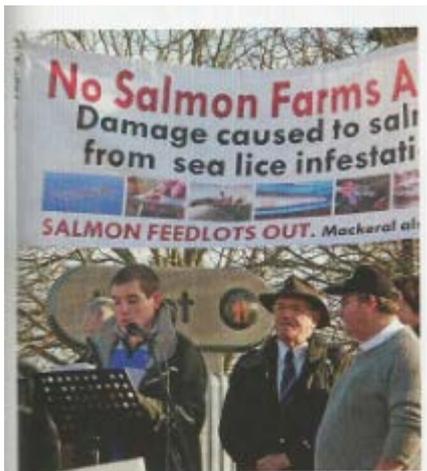


He highlighted a ministerial conflict of interest. Fergus O'Dowd, the minister responsible for approving or rejecting a licence for the Galway farm, appointed the BIM officials that created the proposal. The preliminary licensing of the farm will be conducted by officials from BIM, and BIM is funded by the minister. Therefore, the minister is effectively applying to himself for a licence via BIM. NSFAS and other protestors question how he can possibly balance the interests of conservation with economic generation and make a fair decision.

In its submission IFI took issue with BIM's claim that the farm will create 500 jobs. IFI states that a more realistic figure is 202 and adds that if BIM follows a Scottish aquaculture model it would create just 30 jobs.

IFI also has serious concerns that angling tourism in Ireland, which contributes 143 million euros to the Irish economy, is at risk from the Galway Bay development and two similar "mega" proposals in Mayo and Donegal.

In response to criticism, BIM states that, "The proposed deep-sea fish farm



Speakers at the rally at Carriagline. Another protest is planned for January 26 in Galway.

in Galway Bay could produce up to 15,000 tonnes of organic salmon every year, worth 102 million euros annually, and with a wages flow of about 14.5 million euros, directly into the local economy. BIM is committed to meeting the highest environmental standards, using the most advanced technology to protect our environment and improve efficiency."

NSFAS invites concerned anglers to sign its online petition (more than 1,400 names and counting as we go to press) at [www.nosalmonfarmsatsea.com](http://www.nosalmonfarmsatsea.com)

■ **STOP PRESS:** NSFAS is organising a major protest in Galway on Saturday, January 26. The rallying point and speakers are to be confirmed. Visit: [www.nosalmonfarmsatsea.com](http://www.nosalmonfarmsatsea.com)