

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



Scottish Salmon Watch (SSW) believes that factory salmon farming is a [welfare nightmare](#) riddled with infectious diseases, physical abuse and mass mortalities.

SSW is [calling for a ban](#) on the use of '[Thermolicers](#)' (torture chambers for farmed salmon) and legal action against the Scottish Government and salmon farming companies.

SSW believes Scottish Ministers and salmon farmers are breaching the [Animal Health & Welfare \(Scotland\) Act 2006](#) ([Section 19: "Unnecessary Suffering"](#); [Section 21: "Cruel Operations"](#) and [Section 24: "Ensuring Welfare of Animals"](#)).



Timeline

July 2017 - A damning report - "[RSPCA Assured certification of Scottish farmed salmon](#)" - published by Salmon & Trout Conservation Scotland [exposed the problems at 'welfare friendly' salmon farms](#).

March 2018 - SSW's [submission to the Scottish Parliament's salmon farming inquiry](#) detailed 'Hard Evidence' on lice, diseases and mortalities.

May 2018 - SSW [wrote to the Scottish Parliament's Cross-Party Group on Animal Welfare](#) raising the question whether salmon farms were breaching animal welfare law.

June 2018 - SSW [obtained gruesome photos of diseased and deformed salmon graphically illustrating welfare abuse](#).



July 2018 - SSW [filed a legal complaint with Police Scotland and the Animal & Plant Health Agency](#) (copied to Scottish Ministers) stating that "there is a strong argument for a case to be filed via the Procurator Fiscal".

August 2018 - OneKind published a report - "[Fish Welfare on Scotland's Salmon Farms](#)" - exposing "[a number of welfare breaches including mass mortality, sea lice infestations, disease and escapes](#)".

August 2018 - The Ferret [named and shamed supermarkets](#) selling farmed salmon from companies accused of poor animal welfare.

September 2018 - Shocking [video footage](#) of welfare abuse by The Scottish Salmon Company in Loch Roag was [captured by photographer Corin Smith](#) - triggering coverage by the [BBC 'One Show'](#), [BBC Panorama](#), [The Ferret](#) and [The Daily Mail](#).



September 2018 - A [Motion on the Welfare of Farmed Salmon](#) was lodged with the Scottish Parliament by Mark Ruskell MSP (supported by other MSPs) citing the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006.

October 2018 - SSW [launched a 'Crowd Justice' fundraising campaign to fund legal action.](#)

November 2018 - SSW published photos from whistleblowers working at Marine Harvest (Mowi) and The Scottish Salmon Company illustrating welfare abuse.



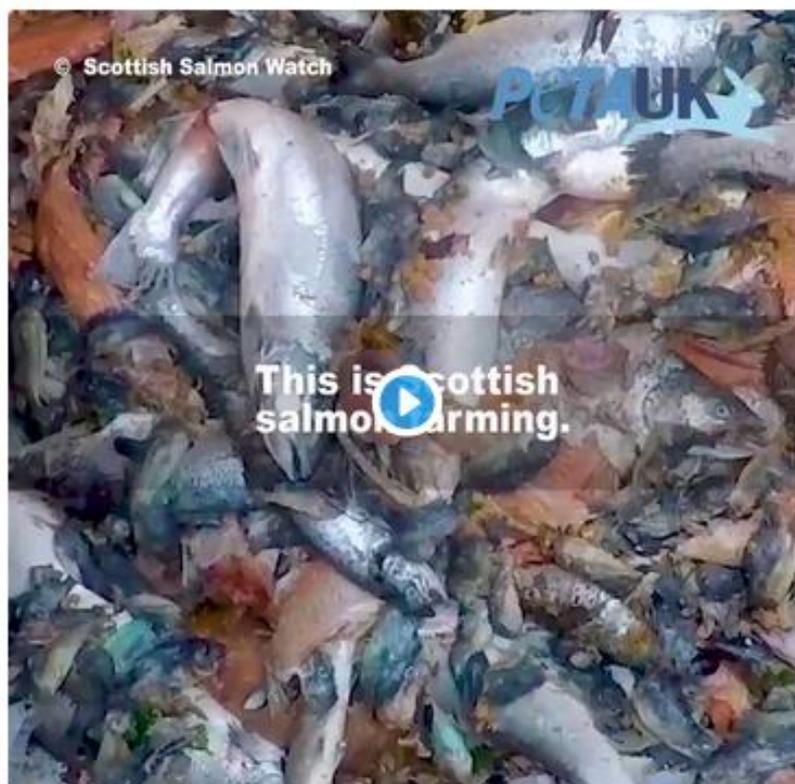
November 2018 - The Sunday Mail [published video footage obtained by SSW](#) of the "disease hell" at Scottish salmon farms.



 PETA UK 
@PETAUK



THIS is unacceptable – don't ignore the cruelty. 🤢💔
#WorldAnimalDay



♥ 42 1:38 PM - Oct 4, 2018



November 2018 - OneKind published a report - "[Cleaner Fish Welfare on Scotland's Salmon Farms](#)" - on animal welfare concerns associated with the use of cleaner fish on Scottish salmon farms and recommendations to better protect their welfare.

March 2019 - SSW published a report - "[The State of Scottish Salmon Farming in 2018](#)" - detailing welfare and disease problems plaguing salmon farms.



June 2019 - [Secret filming by SSW](#) uncovered evidence of welfare abuse at The Scottish Salmon Company's salmon farm in Loch Shildaig ([featured by STV News](#) and [The Ferret](#)) prompting a [complaint to the Animal & Plant Health Agency re. "unnecessary suffering"](#). An [inspection by the Scottish Government](#) (triggered by a [formal complaint filed by SSW](#)) detailed "blind, rubbed and moribund" farmed salmon infested with lice, damaged eyes, boils and flank abrasions.



July 2019 - Over 44,000 people [signed a petition co-ordinated by SumOfUs](#) calling for immediate unannounced inspections of salmon farms to assess fish welfare.

August 2019 - Scottish Ministers [claimed in a letter to SSW](#) that:

There is no evidence to support your assertions that there is widespread welfare abuse at Scottish salmon farms. It is misleading and irresponsible to make such a claim, which ignores the fact all farms operate within the regulatory framework and the vast majority comply. We do not agree that all fish farms must be subject to immediate unannounced inspections.

September 2019 - The Ferret [reported](#) that "Government investigations into alleged animal cruelty after scarred, frayed and lice-infested salmon were filmed at a fish farm on the island of Lewis were a "whitewash", according to a new report ("[An Autopsy of an All-Clear](#)" by Corin Smith).

September 2019 - SSW [compiled new 'case information' \(including photos\)](#) published by the Scottish Government and suggested that "the weight of evidence recording widespread welfare abuse on Scottish salmon farms is surely now so overwhelming to bring legal action for systematic breaches of the [Animal Health & Welfare \(Scotland\) Act 2006](#)?"

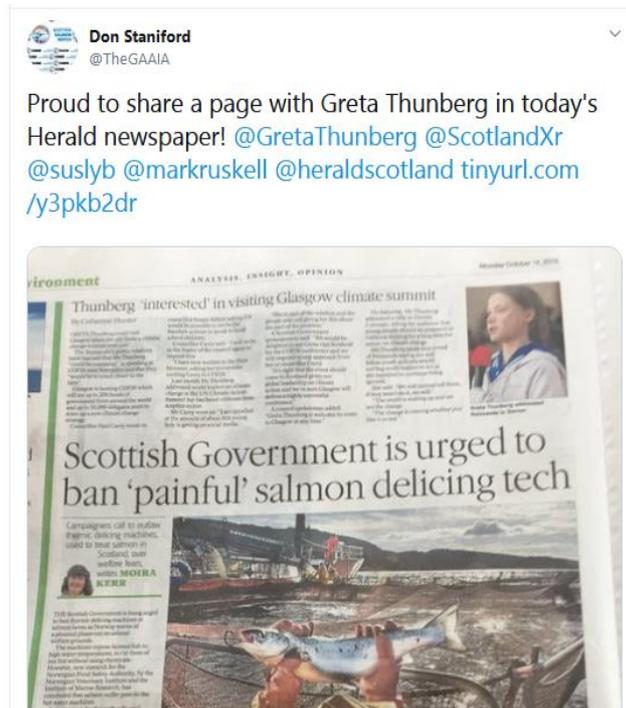
"Scottish Salmon Watch believes that Scottish Ministers - together with the SSPCA ([who is chaired by a salmon farmer](#) - working for [Scottish Sea Farms who in 2018 threatened legal action against the disclosure of photos of welfare abuse of farmed salmon](#)) and the [RSPCA who earn close to £1 million from certifying 70% of Scottish salmon farming production as welfare-friendly](#) - are irresponsible in not policing the [Animal Health & Welfare \(Scotland\) Act 2006](#)," wrote SSW in a blog: "[Welfare Abuse at Scottish Salmon Farms - Why No Legal Enforcement Or Prosecutions?](#)"

"How many more dead and diseased farmed salmon will it take before Scottish Ministers take action against salmon farms for welfare abuse? How high does [Scottish salmon's mort mountain](#) need to rise to before it triggers a prosecution for breach of Section 19 ("[Unnecessary Suffering](#)"); Section 21 ("[Cruel Operations](#)") and Section 24 ("[Ensuring Welfare of Animals](#)") of the [Animal Health & Welfare \(Scotland\) Act 2006](#)?"

October 2019 - SSW [wrote to Scottish Ministers](#) reiterating their call to ban the Thermolicer for breach of the Animal Health & Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 and [publishing new video footage](#).



The [letter](#) suggested that the [Scottish Government's Animal Welfare Commission](#) and the [Scottish Parliament's Cross-Party Group on Animal Welfare](#) investigate the issue.



October 2019 - SSW [revealed from a Freedom of Information reply by the Scottish Government](#) that photos of diseased salmon would continue to be published on a monthly basis despite objections from salmon farming companies ([including legal threats from lawyers acting for Scottish Sea Farms and The Scottish Salmon Company](#) and [objections from Mowi](#)).



Photos: Scottish salmon from Mowi's Stulaigh Island farm in Loch Eynort

November 2019 - [The Ferret revealed](#) that salmon giant Mowi (the largest salmon farming company in Scotland) was "under fire over fish welfare after 700,000 deaths" (Mowi [admitted in a press release](#) to welfare problems of 'cleaner fish' and an inspection by the Animal & Plant Health Agency - which was [triggered by secret filming by SSW in July 2019](#) and a [complaint filed by SSW](#)).



November 2019 - SSW [wrote to Scottish Ministers](#) citing [new scientific research](#) detailing welfare abuse due to the Thermolicer.



Sudden exposure to warm water causes instant behavioural responses indicative of nociception or pain in Atlantic salmon

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Abstract

Thermal treatment has become the most used delousing method in salmonid aquaculture. However, concerns have been raised about it being painful for the fish. We studied the behavioural response of Atlantic salmon acclimated to 8°C when transferred to temperatures in the range 0–38°C. Exposure time was 5 min or until they reached the endpoint of losing equilibrium and laying on their side, a sign of imminent death. At temperatures below 28°C, none of the fish reached endpoint within the 5-min maximum. At 28°C four of five fish reached endpoint, and fish reached endpoint more rapidly as temperature increased further. Fish transferred to temperatures above 28°C had higher swimming speed immediately after transfer and maintained a high swimming speed until just before loss of equilibrium. Their behaviour was from the start characterised by collisions into tank walls and head shaking. Just before loss of equilibrium they started breaking the surface of the water, swimming in a circle pattern and in some instances displayed a side-wise bending of their body. In other words, salmon transferred to temperatures above 28°C showed instant behavioural responses indicative of nociception or pain.

December 2019 - Photos [published by the Scottish Government's Fish Health Inspectorate](#) showed head damage due to high lice loads, bleeding gills, haemorrhaging, lesions and other welfare problems.

Summary: 'Case Information' [published online on 19 December 2019](#)

Mowi - Port na Cro: *Pasteurella skyensis*, Anaemia & lice loads of 20 causing head damage



Grieg - Cole Deep: 100,000+ morts, Piscine Reovirus, AGD, bleeding gills and lesions



January 2020 - Photos [published by the Scottish Government's Fish Health Inspectorate](#) (who in January 2020 [revised how they published 'Case Information'](#)) show welfare abuse at Mowi's salmon farm at Tabaigh in Loch Erisort.



February 2020 - SSW [published a dossier of photos of diseased, deformed and abused Scottish salmon](#) obtained via ['Case Information'](#); [Freedom of Information](#); [sourced from secret filming](#) and [leaked by whistleblowers](#).





