

Marine campaigner floats giant salmon tank scheme to MSPs

Shingi Mararike

Holyrood is considering calls for an overhaul of Scotland's salmon farming industry with fish being contained in giant sealed tanks on land or in the sea rather than kept inside cages.

MSPs are being asked to make "closed containment" mandatory for all salmon farms in the country, amid concern over damage caused to marine life and the seabed. The method, which has been used in Canada and China, sees a physical waterproof membrane placed between farmed salmon and the open water, using a filtering system to prevent the flow of farmed salmon back into the sea.

Mark Carter of conservation group Marine Concern, whose call for the change is before Holyrood's petitions committee, argues that increasing the production of Scottish salmon without more environmental safeguards could be "catastrophic".

In evidence to the Scottish parliamentary committee, he said: "The Scottish economy benefits from the income generated from salmon farming. However, we consider that the industry does a disproportionate amount of environmental harm with impunity.

"We would like the Scottish government to legislate for all salmon farms in Scotland to be closed-containment, using a physical waterproof

membrane between farmed salmon and the open sea, including a pumping or filtering system that prevents direct flow back into the sea, or land-based with similar filtering systems."

Carter believes that closed containment could eliminate a range of environmental concerns associated with the sector, which is one of Scotland's largest employers in rural communities.

These include the shooting of seals that prey on salmon and the spreading of infectious diseases such as sea lice, which can often spread to wild fish outside of the salmon farms, resulting in mass infestation. There is also concern that escapes of farmed salmon can damage wild salmon stocks.

However, cost could prove a stumbling block and Sam Collin, marine planning manager at Scottish Wildlife Trust, said: "Fully-closed systems have the potential to mitigate many of these impacts, but due to high costs and remaining concerns over energy use and fish survival we are unlikely to see the widespread introduction of such systems in the near future."

The Scottish Salmon Producers' Organisation said the sector uses close containment for fish in the freshwater stage of their life cycles, but that the operation would be too costly to scale up to the marine stage.

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Conservation group has urged salmon farms to limit damage by putting a waterproof membrane between farmed fish and open water