

# Cleaner bill of health as welfare improvements help farmed salmon

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THE health and welfare of farmed Scottish salmon improved dramatically last year, according to an industry body.

Sea lice infestations, which had threatened the reputation of the product, reached their lowest levels for six years in 2018, while there was also a massive reduction in spending on treating infested fish, the Scottish Salmon Producers Organisation (SSPO) said.

The improvement has been linked to a change of tack within the industry, with a move away from medicinal treatments to a range of other measures, including cleaner fish that pick off the lice and fresh water treatments.

Speaking at the Fish Veterinary Society Conference in Edinburgh, SSPO chief executive Julie Hesketh-Laird told delegates the sector's spending on medicinal treatments had gone down by 47 per cent in the last three years.

She added: "Fish health and

welfare is at the very heart of successful salmon farming. In spite of changing and challenging marine conditions, salmon farmers are working successfully to innovate, collaborate, take action and manage fish health and welfare.

"Scotland is leading the world in the reporting of salmon survival data and in the sustained management of sea lice. This demonstrates our willingness to be open about our operations and standards of fish health and welfare.

"The sector's reporting of its

performance is above and beyond the many other levels of regulation and voluntary data already shared.

"From today, we will be publishing more current farm-by-farm sea lice and survival data, moving from the three-month reporting schedule we have worked to in the past.

"This enhanced level of transparency should reinforce trust in this important Scottish farming sector."

According to new figures from the organisation, sea lice averages on Scottish farms fell last year to their lowest levels since 2013, with

an average of 0.54 adult female lice per fish.

This is down to a series of new measures helping to drive down sea lice numbers.

Investing in fish such as wrasse and lumpfish, which pick the lice off the salmon in the pens, and technologies such as hydrolicers and thermolicers, which use water and temperature to remove the lice, has contributed to the improvement.

Farms have spent about £53.5 million on these new techniques over the past three years.