

# Grant of £450k to move fish farms out to the open sea

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MORE than £450,000 has been given by a Scottish Government agency to build fish farm pens that could help the controversial industry move from sheltered lochs to offshore.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise say that fish farming could expand beyond inshore waters in the next few years, in a move that could boost the sector's economic value by £3.7 million, creating more jobs.

Leading aquaculture equipment supply firm, Gael Force Group Limited, has secured a £457,000 contribution from HIE – more than

half of which is from the agency's Accelerating Aquaculture Innovation (AAI) fund.

The public sector funding was announced yesterday by Rural Economy Secretary, Fergus Ewing, during a visit to the company's Inverness office.

The money will support a £914,000 project to develop new fish farming pens that can be used in offshore environments, while increasing productivity and improving fish welfare.

Inverness and Moray-based Gael Force has been investing significantly in research and development activities around

aquaculture supply chain products and has grown its workforce to more than 220 employees in Scotland.

This latest project is to develop an integrated offshore pen to operate in more exposed locations, where deep waters and rough seas represent a more challenging environment for both fish farmers and design engineers.

The sites will require more robust pens that are specifically designed to withstand those sea conditions.

Fergus Ewing said: "Scottish salmon was the UK's largest food export in 2017, and it makes a vital contribution to the local economies of some of Scotland's most remote

and vulnerable communities, providing high value employment in many cases.

"Innovation and investment in the sector to ensure it has a long term, sustainable future is key to its continued growth and to achieving the industry's ambitions."

Iain Bolland, HIE's business development account manager for Gael Force, said: "This project reflects Gael Force Group's commitment to innovation and research and development activity and could be a game changer for fish farming in Scotland. It will help grow turnover domestically and internationally.