

Study launched after fish farm escape

A study of wild salmon genetics has begun to gauge the impact of any interbreeding between wild and farm-raised salmon in Scotland.

The multi-year study of 115 sites aims to confirm the current genetic profile of wild salmon and track for potential genetic changes should interbreeding occur.

It follows the recent mass escape of nearly 49,000 mature salmon in August from the Carradale North fish farm, operated by Mowi Scotland.

The escape has seen farmed fish turn up in rivers across Scotland and England at a time when Scotland's wild salmon populations are already said to be approaching crisis point.

The Mowi-funded study will be managed by wild fish conservation body Fisheries Management Scotland (FMS), supported by the Aberdeen-based scientific division of the Scottish Government's Marine Scotland.

But fish welfare opponents claim the horse has already bolted and that farmed salmon already have a 'devastating' impact on wild populations.

Pressure group Inside Scottish Salmon Feedlots said wild fish are paying the price of mass escapes and they represent an unregulated 'form of pollution'.

Since the escape, FMS has been working with member district salmon fishery boards, fisheries trusts and angling associations to monitor the situation and 'mitigate where possible'.

Dr Alan Wells, chief executive of FMS, said: 'We are very disappointed this escape has occurred. It is crucial lessons are learned and that appropriate steps are taken to avoid such escapes happening in future.'

Ben Hadfield, chief operating officer for Mowi Scotland, apologised for any 'disruption and concern' the escape had caused.

Anglers are urged to report catches of farmed fish, using the reporting system on its website.