

The salmon industry's contribution to the economy is said to have been exaggerated, but an industry body rejects this claim

Salmon aid to economy 'inflated'

Katrine Bussey

Scottish ministers are being urged to suspend their support for increased production in the salmon farming sector.

The move comes as a new report states the impact of the industry on employment and the economy has been hugely overestimated.

The study suggests the sector's gross value added (GVA) had been "possibly exaggerated by 124%", while employment "could be overestimated by a massive 251%".

Charles Millar, of the Sustainable Inshore Fisheries Trust, which commissioned the research with Salmon & Trout Conservation Scotland, demanded that the Scottish government authorises an

independent assessment of the economic contribution of salmon aquaculture "that considers the industry in the round".

Millar spoke after the report branded the existing economic data for the sector as "partial" and "incomplete", claiming "income and employment evidence is unreliable".

However, industry body the Scottish Salmon Producers Organisation (SSPO) said the report "makes grotesque assumptions, unfounded claims, and offers numerous unsupported anecdotes as evidence".

Scotland's seven big salmon producers directly employ more than 2,300 people, according to the SSPO website. The organisation said a record

94,300 tons of Scottish salmon was exported to 54 countries in 2019, an increase of 26% on the previous year.

The report accused the Scottish government of failing to consider the impact that expanding the aquaculture sector could have on other industries. It said commercial fishers, particularly creel fishers and scallop hand divers, fear this could reduce their net profits.

Some in the tourism sector, particularly those running sea safaris, are also concerned, the study added.

Geoffrey Riddington, co-author of the report, said: "The reality is that the industry's damage to Scotland's inshore waters must result in many other stakeholder groups being worse off. At no time has the

Scottish government even identified these stakeholder groups, let alone calculated the extent of their costs."

Fergus Ewing, the rural economy secretary, called the timing of the publication of the report "disappointing".

He said: "The Scottish government's focus at this time is fully on supporting our remote, coastal and island communities to cope with the health and economic crisis caused by Covid-19.

"That includes supporting the thousands of jobs and livelihoods linked directly and indirectly to fish farming in these communities and elsewhere in Scotland, and providing people with a healthy, affordable source of protein by ensuring supermarkets stock Scottish salmon."