

NEWS

Scots salmon farmers 'put English waters under threat'

Demand for wrasse from the south coast in order to 'clean' lice-ridden Scottish fish could wreck ecosystem, say campaigners

Julia Horton

Anglers are threatening to take ministers to court over fears that soaring demand for wild wrasse to combat sea lice at Scottish salmon farms could destroy protected marine habitats in English waters.

The Angling Trust warned it will take legal action against the UK government unless officials show they have met requirements under European law to assess the environmental impact of catching vast numbers of wrasse from special areas of conservation off England's south coast.

Anglers say an estimated 1m wrasse are taken each year from along the region's coastline, where they play a key role in the ecosystems of protected reefs, and transported to Scotland for use as so-called cleaner fish to eat deadly lice on infected farmed salmon.

David Mitchell, head of marine policy at the Angling Trust, said: "All the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs [Defra] has provided to us so far is evidence of the sustainability of the wrasse fishery, which is a completely different test. We don't know what the impact of removing them in vast numbers is on ecosystems.

"Wrasse perform a function as a cleaner fish in their natural environment and they are very slow-growing fish with complicated breeding habits. So by the time we find out whether this is having an impact on the ecosystems, it may be too late for wrasse [and those environments] to recover.

"We are calling for the wrasse fisheries to be suspended until appropriate assessments have been completed and the impacts are known."

Fish Legal, a marine law specialist representing the anglers, said that if Defra failed to provide evidence that appropriate assessments had been done, it planned to seek a judicial review, which could result in a mandatory order requiring the UK government to act.

Don Staniford, an anti-salmon farming campaigner at Global Alliance Against Industrial Aquaculture, welcomed the threatened court battle to deal with a "dirty industry spiralling out of control". The Scottish government was "complicit" in sanctioning "overexploitation" of wild wrasse, he added.

Last week a Scottish parliament environment committee report warned that

DAVID CHESKIN



A salmon farm at Loch Linnhe, above; typical damage caused by the lice, below



'Big rig' fish farms may solve turbine issue too

Mark Macaskill

Offshore "super platforms" that will both harness renewable power and allow safe salmon farming could be the future for Scotland's most controversial industries.

Scientists from Britain - including the Scottish Association for Marine Science - and China are looking into the merits of the giant rigs as part of a four-year project. It is envisaged that a single anchored structure could support several 100-metre-tall turbines as well as pens for millions of fish.

Researchers will consider prototypes and assess the effect of vibrations and noise on fish. The idea could solve some environmental dilemmas. Opponents to



Giant platforms could solve the problems of two controversial industries

some of Scotland's 3,300 onshore turbines claim they have spilt landscapes, while fish farming is believed to be partly responsible for declines in wild salmon.

Dr Maurizio Collu, the principal investigator of the project, from Cranfield university, said: "Offshore platforms that can combine many functions could offer

significant benefits in terms of economics, optimising spatial planning and minimising the impact on the environment."

The research is backed by more than £4m of funding. The UK government believes that ocean energy technologies is an area where UK and Chinese companies can work together.

Floating bin in Banff will join battle against plastic

Nick Draine

A marine litter bin which can collect microplastics, plastic bottles and even discarded oil is to be used for the first time in Scotland as part of the fight against growing levels of waste around our coast.

The device, which Aberdeenshire council will install in Banff harbour in April, comprises a pump below a mesh bag which sits on the water. Debris is then sucked down, with the waste material caught in the bag. It also has a sponge which will take in a small oil or diesel spill.

The potential catch equates to about 50,000 plastic bottles or 30,000 paper cups a year, as well as micro plastics down to 2mm in diameter. Last week, a Greenpeace report revealed that nearly



Seabin: traps 50,000 bottles

two thirds of water in some of Scotland's most important feeding grounds for sharks, whales, dolphins and seabirds has been found to contain tiny chunks of plastic pollution. It found 63% of samples tested contained at least one plastic fragment, while some had more than 10 pieces.

The Seabin installation at Banff has the backing of KIMO UK, an Aberdeenshire-based environmental group linking local authorities around the North Sea coast. Coordinator Faron McLellan said: "Seabins are a fantastic, low-cost way to help remove marine litter."

McLellan said the project fits in with KIMO's fishing for litter scheme, which has seen trawlers collect 1,400 tonnes of debris from the sea since 2005. "Once this first seabin has been installed in Banff, we are looking into using our nearby fishing-for-litter skip at Macduff to dispose of litter," he said, adding that other harbours have shown interest.

The Seabin, which costs about £3,000, will be bolted onto a pontoon so it can move with the tide, collecting up to 20kg of waste at a time.

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