

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

SOUTH PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE 12 April 2016

Agenda Item	6.4
Report No	PLS 024/16

**15/04408/FUL: Scottish Sea Farms Ltd
North-west of Ardintigh Bay, Loch Nevis (AKA Nevis 'C')**

Report by Head of Planning and Building Standards

SUMMARY

Description: Proposed expansion of salmon farm

Recommendation: GRANT planning permission

Ward: 12 – Caol and Mallaig

Development Category: Marine Fish Farming Local (with EIA)

Pre-determination hearing: none

Reason referred to Committee: More than 5 objections; objection from a statutory consultee (Lochaber District Salmon Fishery Board)

1.0 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 1.1 This application is for expansion of an existing salmon farm just to the north-west of Ardintigh Bay in the middle reaches of Loch Nevis on the sea loch's south side [see *location map Diagram 1*]. It is one of three salmon farms operated by Scottish Sea Farms Ltd in Loch Nevis. The other sites 'A' and 'B' are further down the loch, on the same side, between Earnsaig and Stoul. The existing approved installation at Nevis 'C' is 9 circular salmon cages, each 80m circumference, along with a 32-tonne capacity feed barge. The proposal, which aims to increase production from the site, is to add 3 more cages of the same dimensions to create a 6 x 2 array of 12 cages. The feed barge would be replaced with a larger capacity (170 tonne) model and repositioned perpendicular to the centre of the cage group on the shore side [see *Diagrams 2, 3, and 4*].
- 1.2 The proposed expansion would mean a 35% increase in cage area and a 51% increase in moorings area. The total area of sea surface which would be occupied by the expanded installation would be 6508 sq.m., whilst the total seabed moorings area would be 26 hectares. The proposed maximum stocked biomass of fish for the site is 1630 tonnes (still to be approved by SEPA at the time of the planning application). This would be a 63% increase compared with the existing consented figure of 1000 tonnes which was set in 2010.

- 1.3 The main shorebase for this fish farm site is at Mallaig harbour. However, there is also a small fenced service and storage area beside the slip at Earnsaig (near the company's Nevis 'A' site). All movement of fish will be by wellboat. The applicant anticipates little increase in farm traffic with the planned expansion. There would be an increase in harvest volume from 19 wellboats for all current production in Loch Nevis to 25 wellboats with the proposed production increase at Nevis 'C'.
- 1.4 Underwater maturation lights (4 x 400w per cage) will be used on the farm at certain times in the production cycle. These are used to slow down the maturation process and increase yield. When in use they are usually only visible close to the site as a very subdued green glow in the water below and immediately around the fish cages.

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

- 2.1 The site lies close to the southern shore of Loch Nevis about 300m NW of Ardingh Bay which has the nearest habitation - an isolated cluster of buildings used as an outdoor activities centre. Of the three salmon farms in Loch Nevis this one is the furthest up the loch and therefore the least accessible. There is no road access here nor at the other two fish farm sites 'A' and 'B'. The coastline adjacent to the Nevis 'C' site is steep and rugged hill slopes with a scattering of native woodland. There is no coastal footpath marked on the OS map here.

3.0 PLANNING HISTORY

- 3.1 The Crown Estate granted Tom McClean a lease for small-scale shellfish farming at the western end of Ardingh Bay in 1987. In the same year Mr McClean obtained a lease for a finfish farm at the site just to the north-west which is the subject of the current application. The moorings area which was sought at that time is similar to the area being applied for now, but then the Crown Estate scaled it down "to minimise effects on fishing and landscape". The total cage area approved at that time was 4800 sq.m. Over the intervening years the installation changed from a compact array of rectangular cages to the current more distributed array of circular cages, but the total cage area has remained much the same.
- 3.2 In 2014 Scottish Sea Farms requested an EIA screening/scoping opinion in advance of the current application for expansion of the farm. The company was told then that an EIA would be required. It was also warned that if planning permission were ultimately granted it would likely be conditional on the site being operated in accordance with an Environmental Management Plan (EMP) to be approved by the Planning Authority. The Council set out the scope of the EMP which would be required. The main elements required were a sea lice management plan, an escape management plan, and a statement of responsibility to "stop the job/activity" if a breach or potential breach of the mitigation/procedures set out in the EMP or legislation occurred. The Council also notified the applicant that the Loch Nevis Aquaculture Framework Plan would be a key consideration in the determination of any application.

4.0 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

4.1 The application was advertised as EIA development on 7 and 8 January in the Oban Times and Edinburgh Gazette respectively.

Representation deadline: 29 January 2016

Timeous representations: 7 (including 6 objections)

Late representations: 0

4.2 Material considerations raised by members of the public are summarised as follows (This section includes, for illustrative purposes, some direct quotes from objectors. Their inclusion here does not imply they are endorsed by the Council.):

- **RISKS TO WILD SALMONID FISH STOCKS AND FRESHWATER PEARL MUSSELS** – Lochaber Fisheries Trust and others have expressed concern that the proposed expansion of salmon production at Nevis 'C' could (along with the other fish farms in Loch Nevis) generate elevated levels of sea lice. These could then infest and potentially kill wild fish within a significant radius. The Trust has quoted research from several countries which suggests that there can be adverse effects up to 30km away from fish farms. If applicable in this instance, that could mean wild salmonid populations in the Rivers Inverie, Carnach, Morar, and Guiserein could be affected.
- The Trust points out that the risk of wild salmonids being exposed to sea lice is related to the absolute number of lice present in the area at any given time. On-farm management targets for control of sea lice are however expressed merely on a number-per-fish basis. With the proposed expansion of biomass at the farm, even if its on-farm sea lice targets are met to the same level as at present, the number of infective lice in the environment is likely to increase. This could increase mortality levels in local wild salmonids which could in turn impact adversely on an important local population of Freshwater Pearl Mussels (a protected species). This is because wild salmonids host the larval stage of the mussels on their gills, help the latter to complete their life cycle, and are integral to the mussel population's sustainability.
- Objectors cast doubt on Scottish Sea Farms' assurances that it can control sea lice within reasonable limits. They argue that these assurances may hold for its farmed stock but they are much less certain for the wild fish in the vicinity. The operator has collected sea lice data at Nevis 'C' since 1999 and in principle this could be used to show the past efficacy of lice management and to help predict the impact of the proposed farm expansion on lice levels.

However in practice, this data is not normally released at single-farm level. It is blurred by amalgamation with data for the other two SSF sites in Loch Nevis and Marine Harvest's fish farm in Loch Hourn. This reduces the data's information value from an environmental monitoring point of view. The Trust and others also question the reliability and sustainability of using wrasse to control sea lice.

- The Trust states that the applicant's assessment of risk to local freshwater pearl mussel populations is "extremely brief and somewhat confused, seeming to suggest that because the mussels and juvenile salmonid hosts remain in fresh water they won't be affected by sea lice." The Trust also considers the quality of the applicant's "Wild Fish Report" to be "astoundingly poor". It therefore argues that a better assessment of the risks needs to be undertaken. It suggest this should include:
 - farm-specific sea lice data for Nevis 'C' covering at least the last two production cycles;
 - data on salmon and sea trout movements from local rivers and through Loch Nevis;
 - lice dispersion modelling for Loch Nevis;
 - analysis of trends in local salmon and sea trout populations using the best available data;
 - a proper assessment of the risk posed to freshwater pearl mussels locally.

If, on the other hand, the Council is minded to approve the current application without such risk assessment, the Trust sees it as essential that such a planning permission requires a stringent and independently-audited monitoring regime and scheduled reviews of performance.

- **IMPACT ON LANDSCAPE AND AMENITY** – the requirement for a larger feed barge could mean increased visual impact ("an added visual eyesore" according to one objector). Noting that the applicant's LVIA (Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment) states the effect of the expansion would not be significant, another objector commented that "the night time visual impact from the increased fish farm activity [*in Loch Nevis*] over recent years has produced significant light pollution in an area that used to have none." The objector added that "noise pollution would also increase. This could also have an adverse effect on the local dolphin and porpoise population."
- **LOCALISED POLLUTION OF SEABED AND DAMAGE TO MARINE LIFE; GENERAL CONCERN RE THE SUSTAINABILITY OF OPEN-MESH FISH FARMING** – another objector pointed out that open-mesh fish farm cages allow fish farm effluent (faecal matter and chemical treatments) to pollute the sea and suggested they are therefore inherently unsustainable. In this instance a priority UK BAP habitat – Seapens and burrowing megafauna in circalittoral fine mud - would be adversely impacted.

In such circumstances, the objector argued, the precautionary principle should apply. In more general terms, marine fish farms should become land-based and use closed containment facilities where controls on all aspects of fish and environmental health would improve sustainability and mean less impact on wildlife.

- **POOR QUALITY OF INFORMATION IN THE EIA** - the seabed survey for this application has, like others commissioned by fish farm companies in recent years, been criticised by an objector for its lack of rigour, eg: “a mere 24 observations were used to describe the ecology along a total transect length of 777 metres...No quantification data are provided and some [*species*] identifications are rudimentary, obtained by haphazard guesswork and quite probably unknowable... The survey overlooks obvious indications that mitigation measures will be required and, because the seabed survey report is thoroughly inadequate, fails to provide information that would inform decision makers of this fact.”

4.3 Names and addresses of those who sent in representations are set out within Appendix C. All the letters can be viewed on the Planning and Development Service ePlanning portal at <http://wam.highland.gov.uk/wam/> using reference number 15/04408/FUL.

5.0 CONSULTATIONS

5.1 Most of the statutory consultees, including SEPA and Marine Scotland Science, have no objections to the proposal. Only one statutory consultee – the Lochaber District Salmon Fishery Board - has registered and sustained an objection. SNH objected initially but subsequently withdrew its objection after Scottish Sea Farms revised its proposed Environmental Management Programme (EMP) for the site. Further details of the consultee responses are given below.

5.2 The **Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA)** has no concerns regarding benthic impacts and subject to the applicant’s compliance with its standard licensing requirements, does not foresee any significant barriers to licensing the proposed expansion of biomass to 1630 tonnes under CAR.

5.3 **Marine Scotland Science (MSS)** has expressed no objection but warned that the proposed development has the potential to increase the risk to wild salmonids. MSS asked for further information on sea lice management arrangements and an attestation as to the suitability of the moorings equipment. This was duly supplied by the applicant. MSS advises that strict control of sea lice should be practised throughout the year to protect sea trout as well as migrating salmon smolts. It also acknowledges that adherence to the sea lice trigger levels (suggested criteria for treatment) which are stipulated in the fish farming industry’s code of good practice may not necessarily prevent release of substantial numbers of lice from aquaculture installations.

- 5.4 **Lochaber District Salmon Fishery Board (LDSFB)** has registered and sustained an objection. This is because it believes the proposed 63% increase in biomass, at what it regards as a sensitive inshore location, means an increased risk of sea lice infestation of wild fish even if the fish farming industry's code of practice is followed. As a general principle the Board does not support the location or expansion of fish farms at inshore locations which are near the paths of migratory salmon and the habitat of local sea trout because technology now exists to farm successfully in more offshore sites.
- 5.5 The Board shares the concerns of Lochaber Fishery Trust in relation to this particular application. It believes that wild salmonids from the Morar catchment, as well as the Knoydart rivers, may pass close enough to the Nevis 'C' farm to be impacted by an increase in biomass and sea lice there. Tracking of salmon and sea trout smolts should therefore have been conducted before the applicant made any assumptions about lack of impact on wild fish. The board also feels that there should have been modelling of possible sea lice impacts ahead of the application. It does not believe the industry's sources of cleaner-fish (ie wrasse or lumpsucker) are as yet reliable or sustainable. The board advises that the application should be refused and recommends that it should only be reconsidered when (a) sea lice dispersal monitoring and wild smolt tracking have been carried out which back up the assertions made in the application, and (b) a sustainable source of cleaner-fish has been established.
- 5.6 After discussions between staff of Scottish Sea Farms, the Council, LDSFB and SNH, the applicant submitted a revised EMP on 7 March. The Board and Lochaber Fishery Trust do not feel this revision is adequate and have maintained their objections. They feel that in order to provide adequate protection for wild fish the EMP should include:
- An Emergency Action Plan with an explicit commitment to reduce absolute lice levels on the farm to the equivalent of the relevant CoGP (Code of Good Practice) target;
 - A lower trigger point for enactment of the Emergency Action Plan;
 - Monitoring of lice burdens on wild fish and analysis of the data along with that of the fish farm lice levels with the future aim of replacing CoGP treatment targets with ones specifically developed for Loch Nevis.
- 5.7 **Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH)** is concerned that the fish farm expansion proposal could (via impacts on wild salmonids in Loch Nevis) adversely affect a local FRESHWATER PEARL MUSSEL population which it considers to be of national importance. It therefore initially objected to the proposal because it did not feel that the applicant's proposed EMP was adequate for monitoring and managing the risks to wild salmonids from sea lice. However, after the applicant revised the EMP on 7 March, SNH withdrew its objection.

- 5.8 In commenting on the first version of the EMP, SNH advised that the management plan should include monitoring of (a) the status of wild salmonid stocks within the local pearl mussel river; and (b) lice numbers on wild fish. In the event that monitoring of lice levels on wild salmonids identifies particular risks, SNH said the plan should describe the hierarchy of further lice control measures which will be used (e.g. wrasse, chemicals, prolonged fallowing, etc.) and the triggers for treatment. The plan should also identify the bodies that will support the Planning Authority in reviewing the monitoring data and a process for implementing any further interventions. SNH also asked the applicant to demonstrate integration with adjacent farms.
- 5.9 The applicant's revised EMP (version 2) commits the company to participate in the monitoring of wild fish in the local river with the FWPM population and to help fund this on an ongoing basis. It stops short of monitoring sea lice levels on wild fish but the company is prepared to consider this option in the future. SNH's response was supportive but it felt that the link between the monitoring and EMP actions should be stronger. If, after annual review, there is consensus amongst the relevant regulators that action is needed on the Loch Nevis fish farms to protect the wild salmon, SNH needs to know that SSF is prepared to take that action.
- 5.10 SNH withdrew its objection because it sees the revised EMP as a significant improvement and an opportunity to build trust and work constructively with the fish farm company as part of a Loch Nevis Management Group. SNH does not however see the revised EMP as fully addressing all its concerns and says the plan would need to be reviewed if the FWPM river were to be subsequently designated as a Special Area of Conservation, or if further biomass increases were proposed in Loch Nevis.
- 5.11 SNH welcomes the use of a trigger for the Emergency Action Plan. However, it does not recognise the figure of four ovigerous female sea lice per farmed salmon as a threshold that would ensure the protection of wild salmonids. SNH's aim is that the Management Group will share, review and discuss the results of the monitoring on an annual basis, and in future years will use the results to review the trigger for enacting the Emergency Action Plan. SNH still feels that monitoring sea lice on wild salmonids in the mouth of the river would add significant value to the monitoring and it welcomes SSF's agreement to consider this as part of future discussions within the Management Group.
- 5.12 LANDSCAPE - SNH does not believe that the proposal will have an adverse effect on the integrity of the Knoydart National Scenic Area or the qualities for which it has been designated. Whilst this is a generally sensitive landscape area, SNH concurs with the applicant's LVIA (Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment) which concludes that the magnitude of change arising from the proposed extension would be small and the overall landscape impacts would be minor to negligible.

- 5.13 SNH welcomes the proposed changes to the location, design and colour of the feed barge. The existing 'floating hut' feed barge has a cluttered makeshift appearance with the hut attracting attention to the fish farm. The new feed barge would be slightly larger but it would be positioned closer to the shore, benefiting from the backdrop and shadow provided by the adjacent hill slopes. The proposed boat-like design should appear more appropriate to its setting. SNH advised that it should be recessive in colour and the proposed dull dark grey colour seemed sensible.
- 5.14 SNH notes the applicant's commitment not to use the nearby mussel site in Ardintigh Bay if expansion of the finfish farm is approved. It sees this commitment as helping to avoid overdevelopment of the bay and ensuring compliance with the Loch Nevis Aquaculture Framework Plan. SNH supports the permanent removal of the mussel farm and agrees that it would reduce landscape and visual impacts overall.
- 5.15 **IMPACT ON SEABED HABITAT** – SNH noted some shortcomings in the seabed video survey footage but felt it was of sufficient quality to allow a judgement regarding the habitats shown. The burrowed mud areas under the deeper water are examples of the Priority Marine Features (PMF): '*Seapens and burrowing megafauna in circalittoral fine mud*' and '*Tall sea pen – Funiculina quadrangularis*'. SNH survey data from 2011 indicates that burrowed mud is found widely in Loch Nevis, Loch Houran and the Sound of Sleat. Furthermore, in depths of less than 100m in Loch Nevis, the tall sea pen is frequent or common. SNH said it was unclear how much of the burrowed mud habitat in the videos would be within the footprint of the proposed fish farm expansion because the survey transects extended well beyond the cages. However, the widespread distribution of similar quality habitat within the local and regional area leads it to conclude that any impacts on the PMF habitat and species will not raise issues of regional or national interest.
- 5.16 **CETACEANS, SEALS, AND PREDATOR CONTROL ARRANGEMENTS** – SNH notes that harbour porpoise have been recorded in Loch Nevis and are likely to be resident for at least part of the year. They are known to be sensitive to the noise emitted by some types of acoustic deterrent devices (ADD) on fish farms. SNH welcomes the applicant's focus on well-tensioned and maintained cage nets and regular removal of any dead fish as the first line of defence against seals. SNH considers the applicant's Information regarding ADD use to be vague so is unable to assess whether best practice is being implemented. However it does not think it likely that the proposed expansion will significantly increase any existing effects on these species.
- 5.17 There were no objections from **Transport Scotland, Historic Environment Scotland, the Crown Estate, Scottish Water or Morar Community Council**. The **Northern Lighthouse Board** set out its requirements for navigational lighting and marking of the site and these will be passed on to the applicant accordingly if the planning application is granted permission.

6.0 DEVELOPMENT PLAN POLICY

6.1 The following policies are relevant to the assessment.

The Highland-wide Local Development Plan 2012:

Policy 28 – Sustainable Design
Policy 36 – Development in the Wider Countryside
Policy 49 – Coastal Development
Policy 50 - Aquaculture
Policy 57 – Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage
Policy 58 – Protected Species
Policy 59 – Other Important Species
Policy 60 – Other Important Habitats
Policy 61 – Landscape
Policy 63 – Water Environment

7.0 OTHER MATERIAL POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Scotland’s National Marine Plan (2015) and Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) (2014)

7.1 The Scottish Government has a target to grow marine finfish production sustainably to 210,000 tonnes by 2020. Scottish Planning Policy (2014) sees the role of the planning system as being to guide development to coastal locations which best suit industry needs with due regard to the marine environment. Both the National Marine Plan and the SPP presume in favour of sustainable development.

7.2 In remote and fragile areas and island areas outwith defined small towns, SPP states that “the emphasis should be on maintaining and growing communities by encouraging development that provides suitable sustainable economic activity, while preserving important environmental assets such as landscape and wildlife habitats that underpin continuing tourism visits and quality of place.”

7.3 The National Marine Plan states that system carrying capacity (at the scale of a water body or loch system) should be a key consideration in identifying appropriate locations for future aquaculture development. It also states that operators and regulators should use a risk-based approach when considering the location of fish farms and their potential impacts on wild fish.

Highland Coastal Development Strategy (2010)

7.4 The coastline adjacent to the proposed fish farm is classified as “Isolated” in the Coastal Development Strategy. This was on the basis that there is no road or significant infrastructure at this location, the existing fish farm presence is not particularly noticeable, and the area affords extended views lacking obvious signs of human activity and generally wild and natural. Coastline thus classified may be regarded as of relatively high sensitivity.

This however is a broad-brush classification. The Aquaculture Framework Plan for Loch Nevis recognises that the immediate environs of Ardintigh Bay, if taken on their own, could be classified as “Undeveloped” which indicates medium sensitivity. The Council’s strategy for the West Coast “supports the development of aquaculture which is compatible with other coastal interests, tailored to the potential and sensitivities of respective sites and at a scale which is within the visual and biological carrying capacity of the areas concerned”.

Loch Nevis Aquaculture Framework Plan (2009)

7.5 The site falls within policy zone ‘F’. The Plan recognises that this zone is the one in Loch Nevis which is best able to accommodate fish farming without detriment to the area’s scenic character and other interests. To maintain an acceptable balance, the Plan advises that the scale and extent of development require careful management. To keep the fish farms relatively unobtrusive they need to remain close to the shore, discreet in their scale, and the design of their surface equipment needs to be sympathetic to their surroundings. The Plan notes that the historical combination of finfish farming and shellfish farming with longlines in Ardintigh Bay has resulted in a somewhat cramped layout which could be addressed by relocation.

7.6 The area policy for zone ‘F’ is:

Presumption in favour of finfish or shellfish installations which are discreet in their scale, spacing, and the design of their surface equipment. The area within 1 km either side of the point at Stoul should be kept clear of aquaculture installations to safeguard the amenity of this area and views from the approach path.

The current proposal seems broadly consistent with that advice but proposals for any further significant expansion of the installation thereafter may not be acceptable.

8.0 PLANNING APPRAISAL

8.1 Section 25 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 requires planning applications to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The Development Plan in this case comprises the Highland-wide Local Development Plan.

Determining Issues

8.2 The determining issues are:

- do the proposals accord with the development plan?
- if they do accord, are there any compelling reasons for not approving them?
- if they do not accord, are there any compelling reasons for approving them?

Planning Considerations

- 8.3 Key planning considerations in this case are: (a) development plan and other material policy considerations, (b) economy, (c) landscape, visual amenity and noise, (d) impact on wild salmonid fish populations and freshwater pearl mussels, (e) impact on seabed habitats and the water column.

Development Plan Policy

- 8.4 The key policy considerations are Policies 50 (Aquaculture) and 58 (Protected Species) of the Highland-wide Local Development Plan. Policy 50 states that the Council will support the sustainable development of finfish and shellfish farming subject to there being no significant adverse effect on the natural heritage and existing activity. In this instance the key natural heritage interests are the Knoydart National Scenic Area, a local population of Freshwater Pearl Mussels which SNH regards as nationally important, and the local wild salmonid population which helps to sustain the latter. The relevant existing activities which could conceivably be affected by the proposed expansion are local riparian fishing interests, the outdoor activities centre at Ardintigh, and recreational visitors who value the Knoydart area for its wildness and scenic quality. Policy 58 states that where there is good reason to believe that a protected species may be affected by a proposed development, a mitigation plan will be required to avoid or minimise any impacts on the species before determining the application.
- 8.5 The principle of fish farm development has already been established and accepted at this site. The issue is whether the proposed expansion can be accommodated without significant adverse effects. The broad indications are that it can, provided that adequate safeguards are established for the local wild salmonids and FWPM population. The visual impact of the fish farm would increase somewhat with the addition of 3 more cages to the existing group of 9 and substitution of a larger feed barge. However, this will be mitigated by the promised removal of a shellfish farm adjacent, and the relocation of the feed barge to a less exposed and visible position. The existing fish farm is outwith the immediate visual envelope of Ardintigh Bay and its proposed expansion will take place at the eastern end of the farm so it should not impact on the outdoor activities centre. The expansion should not restrict access to the area by kayakers and walkers, or significantly diminish their quality of wilderness experience.
- 8.6 There *is* good reason to believe that a protected species, FWPM, could be affected indirectly by the expansion of biomass which would follow installation of the additional cages. However, the applicant's revised EMP for the fish farm will help to minimise the chance of adverse interactions, and on the strength of this, SNH, the primary guardian of the FWPM interest, has retracted its objection.

- 8.7 Sport fishing interests have expressed concern about the risk to wild salmonids from elevated levels of sea lice and another objector has taken issue with the likely damage to a section of BAP priority seabed habitat at the proposed site. However, there are no objections from the relevant regulatory authorities in these respects (MSS, SNH and SEPA). The applicant's revised EMP may not deliver everything which the sport fishing interests may desire but it seems a reasonable compromise in which the applicant has shown willing to contribute in a practical way to monitoring the health of the local wild fish population, and is committed to implementing the industry best practice standard (or better) to help ensure that the wild fish population stays healthy. On this basis the current proposal would appear to be consistent with the Development Plan, the Highland Coastal Development Strategy, the main thrust of the National Marine Plan and Scottish Planning Policy.

Economy

- 8.8 Scottish Sea Farms currently employs 14 staff full-time and 1 part-time on its three farms in Loch Nevis. The proposed expansion of its site 'C' will not significantly increase the level of direct employment here. However, it will increase the job security for workers at the Nevis sites and in the company's processing factory at South Shian in Argyll.

Landscape, visual amenity and noise

- 8.9 As mentioned above, the fish farm lies within the Knoydart National Scenic Area which is noted for its rugged coastal scenery, sea lochs which penetrate a remote and roadless mountain interior, and extensive areas of wilderness character. However, the site of the fish farm is not a particularly sensitive or obtrusive one. Nor is it particularly wild on account of the proximity of buildings at Ardintigh Bay. The site is a quiet north-facing bay without any significant coastal path. It has steep and rugged north-facing hill slopes adjacent which are often in shadow so provide a dark backdrop to absorb the visual impact of the fish farm as seen from the ferry route and most other angles.
- 8.10 The applicant acknowledged at the EIA screening/scoping stage that its existing feed barge has "a rather industrial appearance". The new barge which the company proposes to use instead is more boat-like in appearance and the applicant says this can be finished in colours agreed with the Council and SNH. The proposed repositioning of the feed barge on the shoreward side of the cage group should also minimise its visual impact. The proposed removal of the shellfish farm in Ardintigh Bay is a good offer by the applicant because it will offset the increased visual impact of the expanded finfish farm and reduce visual clutter in the bay generally.

- 8.11 It is important that muted colours are used for all surface gear apart from safety/navigation equipment and it is important that deck lighting is carefully controlled since this was a problem in the past. To the west of the fish farm site the Stoul area and the headland of Torr nan Gamhainn form an attractive location for walkers, kayakers and wild camping. If there are further pressures for expansion of the fish farm westward it should not be allowed to encroach on this area. The fish farm should not be allowed to expand or relocate any further west than the bottom of the steep gully on the south-east side of Torr a' Chonnaidh.
- 8.12 The nearest onshore buildings are those of the outdoor activities centre about 700m from the fish farm. Since the fish farm is close to a wild land area and tranquillity is an important element of the appeal of the middle and upper reaches of Loch Nevis, a standard condition should be attached to any grant of planning permission to keep noise from the fish farm within reasonable limits.

Impact on wild salmonid populations and freshwater pearl mussels

- 8.13 The applicant's record for sea lice management and control of escapes at the Loch Nevis sites appears to be relatively good. However this does not mean that things will always go well in the future and the environmental risks associated with an increasing fish farm biomass in Loch Nevis need to be managed. The vulnerability of the FWPM population to environmental changes which may harm the wild salmonids on which they depend, means that a robust EMP is required. However, the presence of fish farms in Loch Nevis is not the only potential influence on local wild salmonid populations and FWPM so the EMP needs to be reasonable in the responsibilities which it places on the fish farm operator.
- 8.14 The fish farm operator's willingness to work as part of a multi-agency management group, and to contribute financially to the monitoring of a wild fish population in the area on a continuous basis (as a proxy for the health of the FWPM population), is a significant concession. Even from the outset it will be helpful in establishing a baseline against which future performance can be judged.
- 8.15 The applicant's revised EMP (now in version 3) has sought to address at least some of the concerns expressed by LDSFB, the Lochaber Fishery Trust, and SNH. It embraces all three fish farms in Loch Nevis (not just Nevis 'C') and it is a living document which will be updated in consultation with SNH and the Planning Authority. It proposes a confidentiality agreement with the Fishery Board and Trust which could mean the fish farm company provides these bodies with the site-specific monthly sea lice data that they seek. It will also give officers of these bodies the opportunity to visit the fish farms to observe the sea lice sampling in practice. There is a statement of responsibility to ensure "the necessary action" is taken to address any breach of the mitigation measures/ procedures set out in the EMP, and there is an Emergency Action Plan which will come into play if the mean number of ovigerous female lice exceeds four per fish. [see *Appendix D*]

- 8.16 However, the company has not set the thresholds for emergency action on the fish farm as low as the sport fishing interests and SNH would like and the EMP does not oblige the fish farm company to monitor lice burdens on wild fish. Neither of these as yet are statutory requirements or enshrined in the fish farm industry's code of good practice. The revised EMP produced for the current application at Nevis 'C' is a compromise between addressing environmental concerns and ensuring the fish farm's commercial viability. Appendix E gives more detail on the applicant's response to comments on the version 2 EMP.

Impact on seabed habitats and the water column

- 8.17 Some of the objectors are opposed to open-cage fish farming in principle and regard any environmental impact on the seabed or water column as unacceptable, however localised. SEPA and Marine Scotland Science however are the key regulatory bodies in this respect and they are prepared to sanction significant impacts from a fish farm over a limited area of seabed (the AZE or Allowable Zone of Effect). Both bodies have checked the calculations of likely benthic and water column impacts from the proposed fish farm and they find these acceptable.
- 8.18 The seabed video survey shows the presence of a type of habitat and a species which are classed as Priority Marine Features in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. The Council's responsibility under Policy 60 in the Highland-wide Development Plan is to have regard to the value of such priority features and to avoid significant harm to their ecological function and integrity. In this instance SNH does not believe the application raises issues of regional or national interest because its survey information shows that the habitat and species concerned are widespread in the Knoydart sea lochs and Sound of Sleat. Only a relatively small area of seabed would be affected by the proposed fish farm expansion.

9.0 CONCLUSION

- 9.1 In reaching a view on this planning application all relevant planning policies and guidance have been considered, along with the applicant's supporting information, consultee responses and public comments.
- 9.2 In light of the considerations above, the proposal may be regarded as being broadly in accordance with the terms of the Highland-wide Local Development Plan. That is on the understanding that reasonable safeguards will be put in place to protect wild salmonids populations locally and the Freshwater Pearl Mussels which depend on them. The Lochaber District Salmon Fishery Board and Lochaber Fishery Trust do not believe the applicant's revised EMP goes far enough to deliver such safeguards. However, the level of commitment they are looking for from the fish farm company may be unrealistic at this point in time and the Council is not empowered to control or authorise fish farm biomass which is the fishing organisations' main concern.

The applicant's willingness to make a practical, long-term commitment to the monitoring of wild fish stocks and collaborative working to protect these and the FWPM interest is welcome. It is also significant that SNH, whose statutory duty it is to protect the FWPM interest, is content that, for the present at least, a reasonable compromise has been reached.

10.0 RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the application is **GRANTED** subject to the following conditions:

1. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the submitted application, the Admiralty chart extract showing the location and proposed new layout of the fish farm, and the most up to date versions of the Environmental Statement and its annexes. For the avoidance of doubt, the relevant version of appendix 11 (the applicant's Environmental Management Plan) is the version 3 revision received by the Planning Authority on 21 March 2016. Any departures from the above documentation must be approved in writing by the Planning Authority in advance.

Reason: to ensure that the development is properly implemented and its associated Environmental Management Plan is put into effect to provide reasonable safeguards for local populations of wild salmonids and Freshwater Pearl Mussels.

2. All surface equipment, with the exception of navigational markers, shall be finished in a dark matt neutral colour unless alternative finishes are agreed in advance in writing with the Planning Authority. In particular, the feed barge top nets, and netting along walkways shall be matt grey. Pipes between the automated feed barge and the cages shall be dark-grey or black, neatly bundled to minimise clutter and routed below water where it is practical to do so.

Reason: to minimise the visual impact of the installation and to help safeguard the integrity of the Knoydart National Scenic Area.

3. All lighting above the water surface and not required for safe navigation purposes should be directed downwards by shielding. It should be extinguished when not required for the purpose for which it has been installed. If lighting is required for security purposes, infra red lights and cameras should be used.

Reason: to minimise the visual impact of the installation; to ensure that lights left on in the daytime do not draw the eye towards the site and at night do not present unnecessary sources of light pollution.

4. Prior to the commencement of development, any remaining shellfish farming equipment in the Ardintigh Bay area adjacent to the finfish farm shall be removed. No further use shall be made of this area for shellfish farming while the finfish farm is present.

Reason: to minimise the visual impact of aquaculture operations in Ardintigh Bay and to comply with the Loch Nevis Aquaculture Framework Plan.

5. All plant, machinery and equipment associated with the fish farm shall be so installed, maintained and operated such that any associated operating noise does not exceed noise standard NR 20 when measured or calculated within any noise sensitive premises with windows open for ventilation purposes.

Reason: to protect the amenity of buildings and recreation/camping areas adjacent to Ardintigh Bay and to avoid noise nuisance.

6. In the event of equipment falling into disrepair or becoming damaged, adrift, stranded, abandoned or sunk in such a manner as to cause an obstruction or danger to navigation, the site operator shall, within a period of 28 days, carry out or make suitable arrangements for the carrying out of all measures necessary for lighting, buoying, raising, repairing, moving or destroying, as appropriate, the whole or any part of the equipment so as to remove the obstruction or danger to navigation.

Reason: in the interests of amenity and navigational safety.

7. At least three months prior to cessation of use of the site for fish farming, a scheme for the decommissioning and removal of all equipment shall be submitted to and agreed in writing with the Planning Authority. Upon cessation the approved scheme shall be implemented.

Reason: to ensure that decommissioning of the site takes place in an orderly manner and to ensure proper storage and disposal of redundant equipment in the interest of amenity and navigational safety.

Signature: Allan J Todd

Designation: pp Head of Planning and Building Standards

Author: Colin Wishart, Principal Planner, Coastal Planning Team

Date: 5 April 2016

Appendices: A: Maps – location and site layout;
B: Drawings, photographs, and photomontages;
C: List of Representations
D: Applicant's revised Environmental Management Plan (version 3)
E: Applicant's response to comments on EMP version 2

Appendix A: Maps

Diagram 1: Location of proposed fish farm

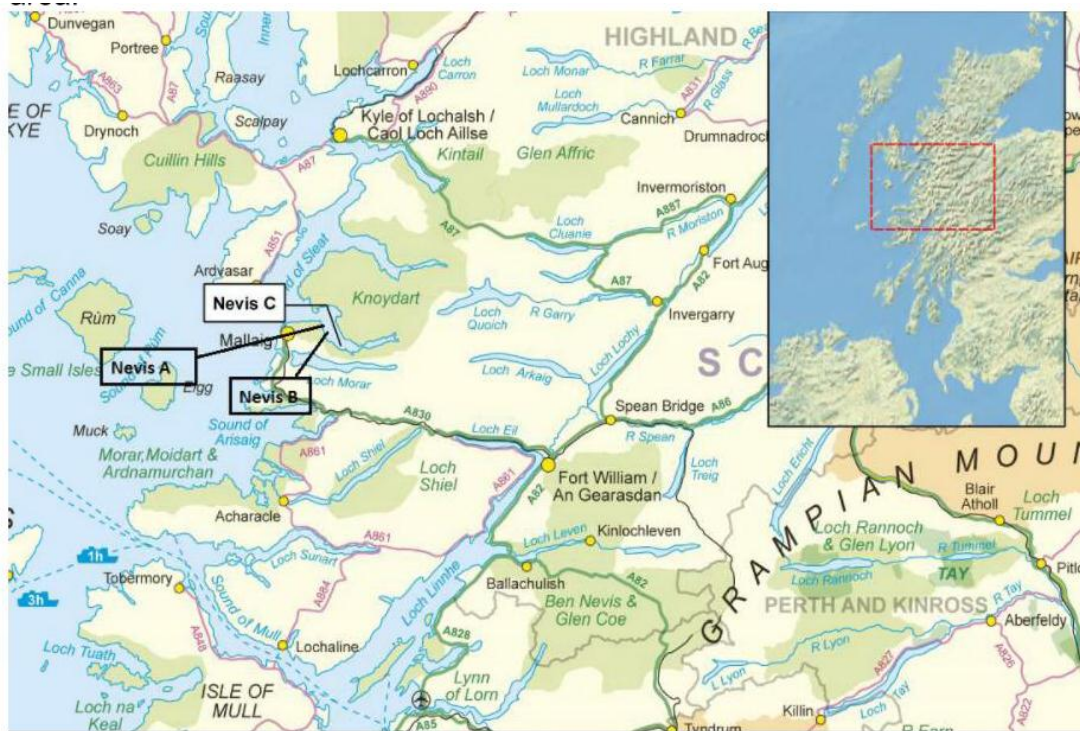
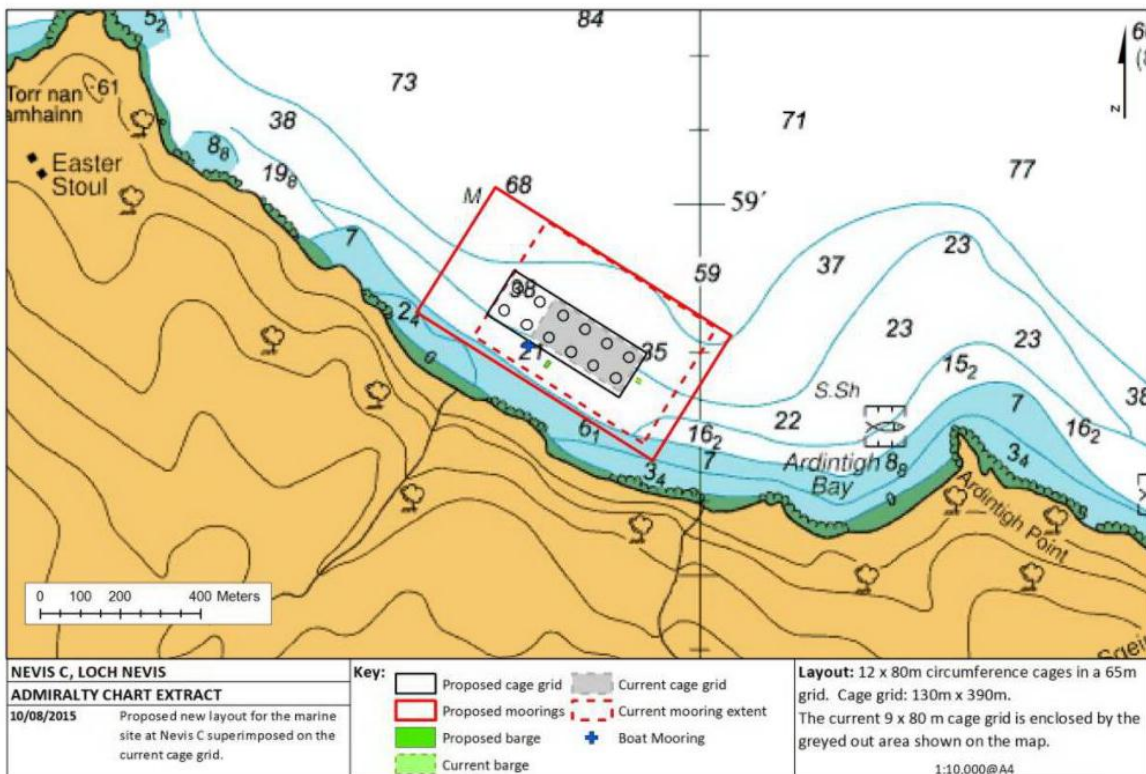


Diagram 2: Layout of proposed fish farm



Appendix B: Drawings, photographs, and photomontages

Diagram 3: Example of salmon cage

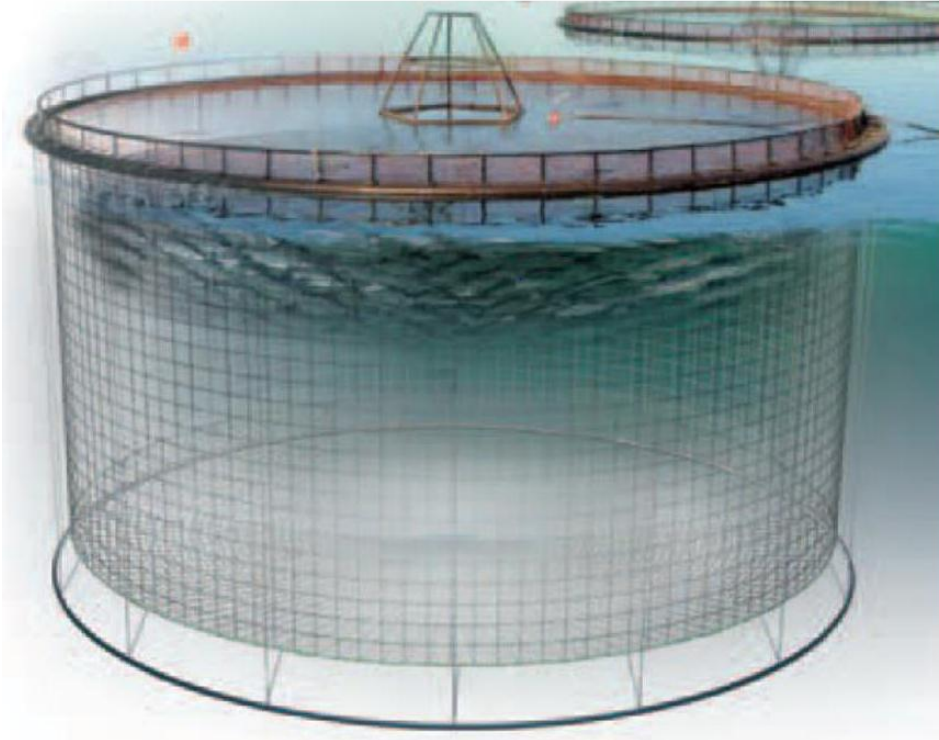


Diagram 4: Example of proposed Macduff feed barge (170 tonnes capacity)



Diagram 5: Photomontage of expanded fish farm from viewpoint 7 (Sgurr nan Gobhar), looking SW



Diagram 6: Photomontage of expanded fish farm from viewpoint 3 (Ardintigh Activity Centre), looking NW



Appendix D: Applicant's revised Environmental Management Plan (version 3)

[the text below excludes a confidential appendix 3 which deals with the location and funding of the monitoring work]



Nevis C Environmental Management Plan

21st March 2016

The Environmental Management Plan (EMP) undertakes to consider potential impacts from Scottish Sea Farms (SSF) Loch Nevis sites on wild salmonids. The plan applies equally to all the Scottish Salmon Producers Organisation's Code of Good Practice (SSPO CoGP) Area M-26 farms: Nevis A, B & C. The EMP confines itself to auditable best practice which meets the established tests for a planning condition of being necessary, relevant to planning and to the development to be permitted, enforceable, precise and reasonable in all other respects.

This EMP will of necessity be an evolving document, and will stand alongside the site's Veterinary Health Plan. Over time, for reasons beyond SSF's control, circumstances will change and new opportunities arise. Accordingly this document will be updated in line with the Farm Management Statement to reflect changes in management strategy. Any such changes to this EMP will be in consultation with SNH and the Planning Authority. A copy of the updated version will be supplied to the Planning Authority.

a) Sea Lice Management Plan

1. SSF farms in Loch Nevis have a site design with a cage structure and net design that enables the application of integrated sea lice management, i.e. sites will have sufficient SEPA consented medicines to enable rotation of full-enclosure bath treatments and infeed treatments.
2. SSF farms in Loch Nevis will have a synchronous fallow of at least four weeks prior to each restocking.
3. SSF farms in Loch Nevis are designed to facilitate the biological control of sea lice through the use of cleaner fish, with each cohabiting species supported by a specific veterinary health plan.
4. Clean nets are integral to the maximum efficacy of cleaner fish species and nets are maintained to a high standard of cleanliness. The sites have a dedicated net cleaning specialist and will employ the best technologies in net cleaning and maintenance.
5. SSF farms in Loch Nevis will have their respective sea lice counts collated centrally and viewed as a whole, with the Nevis site manager having a responsibility to coordinate collection and review.
6. Sea lice counts shall be recorded weekly from all stocked pens. A minimum of five fish will be randomly sampled from each pen.

7. Each SSF Loch Nevis site shall have a designated and formally trained biological control (fish health) specialist.
8. All staff participating in SSF Loch Nevis sea lice counts (Site Manager, Senior Husbandryman, Husbandryman, Fish Health Biologist & Biological Control Manager) will have formal certificated training in sea lice recognition and recording.
9. The record sheet used in counting sea lice shall be signed by the Husbandryman leading the task, dated, pen addresses noted, and water temperature recorded.
10. Sea lice counts from all SSF Loch Nevis farms will be supplied to SSPO to place in public domain in line with the designated Fish Health Management Reporting Regions.
11. SSF propose a confidentiality agreement with the Lochaber District Salmon Fishery Board (LDSFB) and the Lochaber Fisheries Trust (LFT), undertaking to supply them with site specific monthly sea lice adult female *Lepeoptherius salmonis* trend data.
12. If requested SSF will host a site visit to all Loch Nevis farms by LDSFB and LFT to view sea lice sampling during the critical Feb-June period annually.
13. If requested SSF will facilitate a site visit to all Loch Nevis farms for relevant officers of The Highland Council's planning department and/or SNH to allow viewing of monthly sea lice adult female *L. salmonis* trend data.
14. SSF Loch Nevis will record sea lice census data on our site based database FishTalk, where it will be retained for a minimum of three years.
15. SSF in Loch Nevis will undertake a sea lice sensitivity analysis as early as practical each crop to inform potential medicinal intervention.
16. A critical decision flow diagram that will define any intervention is supplied in Appendix 1. Rising ovigerous female lice levels will trigger a cascade of management actions if observed during routine monitoring:
 - Ensure clean nets
 - Review cleaner fish husbandry
 - If numbers continue to rise, medicine intervention will be considered under the conditions listed in 18-24
 - An emergency action plan will be triggered in the event that the mean number of ovigerous female lice exceeds four individuals per fish at Nevis C (Appendix 2)
17. SSF has a presumption for the treatment of farmed Atlantic salmon at our Loch Nevis sites of no more than an average 0.5 ovigerous female *L. salmonis* per fish in the period 1st Feb to 30th June inclusive and no more than an average 1.0 ovigerous female *L. salmonis* per fish in the period 1st July to 31st January inclusive.
18. The decision on medicinal intervention will be a matter of interpretation depending on the likely efficiency of any existing biological control, and will focus on the critical *L. salmonis* ovigerous female trend data.
19. Final decision-making on medicine choice and dose rate will be a matter for the SSF prescribing veterinary surgeon, giving consideration to the prevailing health status of the stock, the sensitivity of sea lice and the available SEPA discharge consent.
20. Where medicinal treatment is required for lice control at more than one Nevis site, SSF will treat sites with a target of completing all pens at risk within one

week. This is dependent upon the individual constraints of the SEPA consents with respect to the medicine of choice.

21. Bath treatments will be by full enclosure tarpaulin or wellboat. The aim is for 100% treatment efficacy.
22. Treatment efficacy will be calculated for every medicinal intervention.
23. Where treatment efficacy is under 50% for two successive treatments and no procedural explanation exists then an Adverse Reaction notification will be filed with the Veterinary Medicines Directorate.
24. Should the Emergency Action Plan for Nevis C need to be enacted (Appendix 2) preventative management strategies will be reviewed and improved upon before the next cycle.
25. The principle of “final stocking” currently applies within Loch Nevis. This production model does not move or mechanically grade stocks. There is therefore no seawater-seawater movement or risk.
26. Harvesting of fish from our Nevis sites is carried out by pre-disinfected wellboat. The vessel has closed-valve technology eliminating potential sea lice discharge. The vessel is compliant with Annex 5 of the SSPO CoGP and Freedom Foods standards.

b) Escapes Management Plan

1. SSF farms in Loch Nevis have a site design, cage structure, net design and specification that minimise the risk of escapes occurring.
2. A Nevis C Escapes Prevention and Recapture Strategy is kept up to date and on-site. A copy of the Marine Scotland 2012 guidance entitled “What to do in the Event of a Fish Farm Escape” is posted in the staff common room. In the unlikely event an escape occurs, the following immediate action will be taken:
 - Identify escape risk or cause and take action to prevent further release of fish
 - Be prepared to call in diver team to help secure the site (available on 24-hour call-out)
 - Inform Site Manager and Production Manager
 - Notify Marine Scotland Science by both phone call and email to the Duty Inspector, in accordance with legal requirements
 - Notify the Lochaber District Salmon Fishery Board and the Lochaber Fisheries Trust, and be prepared to deploy recapture nets (kept on permanent standby at the Mallaig shorebase) if they request it, with the permission of Marine Scotland
 - If an escape is confirmed SSF will notify our insurers, and police if criminal action is suspected. A final notification form will be sent to Marine Scotland within 28 days of the incident, providing the requested details on the escaped fish.
3. Immediate reporting of any loss or escape of farmed salmon to the Fish Health Inspectorate branch of Marine Scotland Science is a statutory requirement. Escape details are freely available on the Scotland Aquaculture website.
4. All stock inputs at Nevis C will be counted off the well boat using the boat’s own automatic counter. All fish numbers are recorded in the sites’ Marine Scotland Movement Books and a copy of the well boat count is kept in the Shipment notes folder at our Mallaig shorebase.

5. Nets are visually inspected weekly by site staff and checked for damage monthly by divers. Nets are sent away at least once per cycle for servicing and strength testing. Nets have a breaking strain of 66kg and 84kg when woven into the 15mm and 18mm mesh size respectively.
6. All use of nets is monitored internally (transfer to site date, site, cage number, any damage during period of use, dates changed, dates of cleaning, repair record, storage record etc.). The site manager is responsible for ensuring records are maintained.
7. Each net pen is given a unique number, and is tagged at two positions on the head rope. This ensures traceability of the net in the net system during and post manufacture, and during operation and maintenance.
8. A site-specific predator control plan is in place to minimise the risk that wild predator species attempt to access the fish within the cages, which could result in net damage.
9. The cage and top net mesh sizes and the correct net tension protect against the ingress or entanglement of wild species. To prevent access to the cages by predators from above, each cage is sealed with a tensioned heavy duty nylon top net.
10. An internal audit process is carried out annually against a combined internal checklist which includes the following: CoGP, RSPCA Freedom Food, Global Gap, ISO14001/ISO9001, and any relevant retailer specific standards. External audits also occur periodically. Risk events, inventory and containment procedures fall within this remit.
11. All staff sign the Escapes Prevention and Recaptures Strategy to confirm they have read and understood its contents. Any new staff will have environmental awareness training as part of their site induction. SSF ensures all staff training is documented. Individual training records are kept on site.

c) Commitment to participate in monitoring programme – please see Appendix 3 [confidential - not reproduced here]

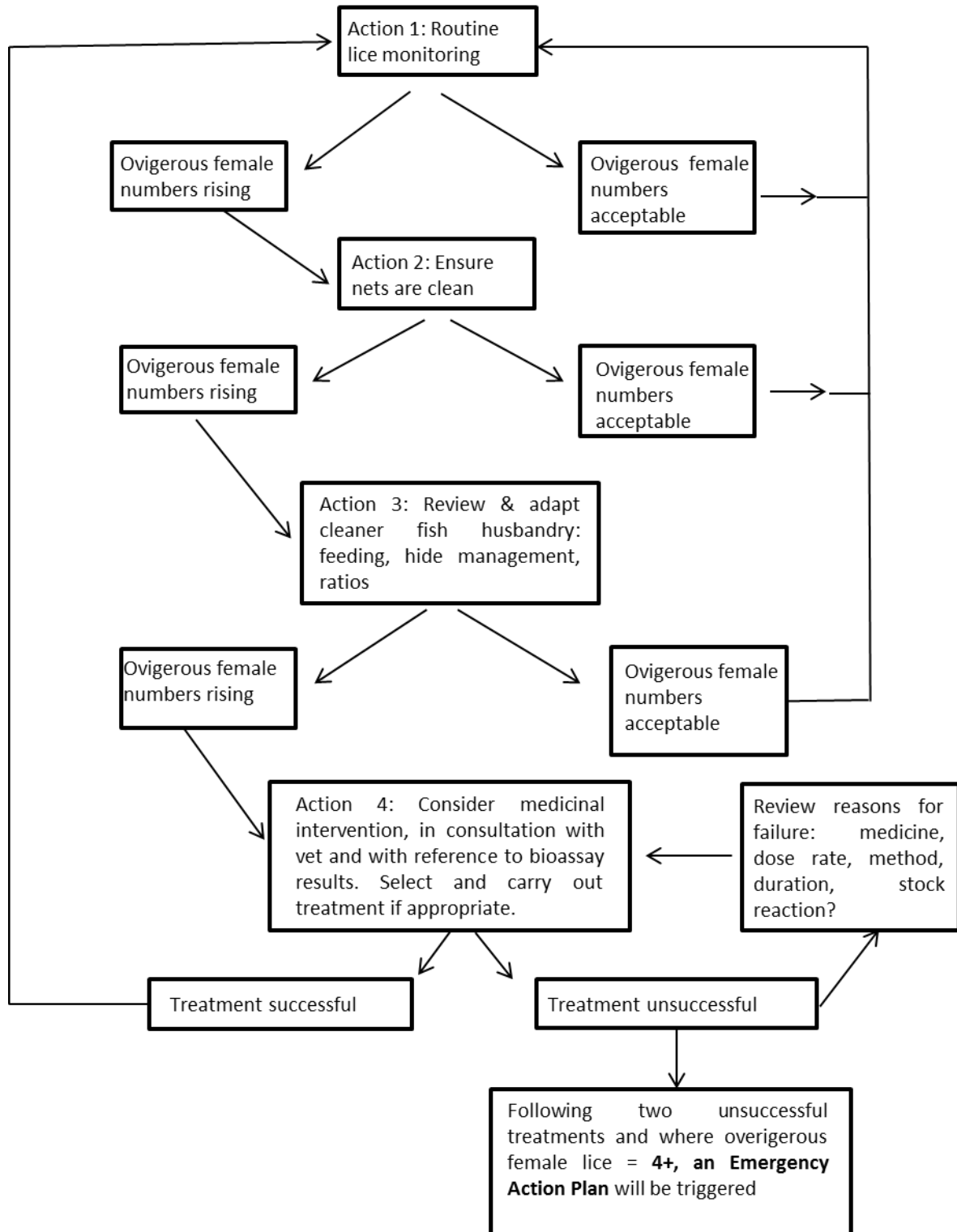
d) Statement of responsibility

SSF are committed to effective sea lice management, escape prevention and maintaining local biodiversity. Should a breach or potential breach of the mitigation measures/procedures set out in this EMP occur, SSF will ensure the necessary action is taken to address the breach. We undertake to constantly innovate and improve our operations as a company as part of our commitment to being a responsible developer.

Appendix 1

Appendix 1: Critical decision flow diagram for sea lice management

- Assumptions: 1. Bioassay carried out early (point a14)
2. Biological control in place (cleaner fish)



Appendix 2

Emergency Action Plan for Nevis C

This plan will come into play in the event that the mean number of ovigerous female lice exceeds four individuals per fish.

The action plan is designed to reduce numbers of ovigerous female lice to comply with COGP within one month of the plan being enacted. LSDFB and LFT will be notified of the action plan coming into play.

The action plan will be submitted to SSPO and will be made available to Highland Council, SNH, SEPA, MSS, LDSFB and LFT to view on site. Each point will be subject to consideration as part of a cascade of management actions and the decision making process will be documented.

1. Determine if introducing additional cleaner fish will lead to a satisfactory reduction in ovigerous female lice numbers. If not, move to option 2.
2. Determine if switching the medicine is appropriate and if not, consider paired treatment options to increase efficacy- on veterinary advice. If not, or if results are not satisfactory, move to option 3.
3. Determine if deployment of non-medicinal interventions is appropriate, e.g. Thermolicer, SkaMik, Hydrolicer. If not, or if results are not satisfactory, move to option 4.
4. Risk-assess partial harvesting as a means of increasing ratio of cleaner fish to salmon. If this option is not effective, move to option 5.
5. If all of the above options have failed to reduce overigous female lice levels, SSF will assess sustained harvesting of fish on a pen by pen basis, starting with pens with highest ovigerous female lice numbers, informed by continual monitoring of farm lice data.
6. Status report supplied to SSPO within seven days of the one month deadline.

Appendix E: Applicant's response to comments on EMP version 2

Consultee	Consultee's comment	SSF Response
SNH	We welcome the use of a trigger for the Emergency Action Plan. However we do not recognise/endorse the figure of four ovigerous female sea lice per farmed salmon as a threshold which we can be confident will protect wild salmonids.	SSF has a presumption for the treatment of farmed Atlantic salmon at our Loch Nevis sites of no more than an average 0.5 ovigerous female <i>L. salmonis</i> per fish in the period 1st Feb to 30th June inclusive and no more than an average 1.0 ovigerous female <i>L. salmonis</i> per fish in the period 1st July to 31st January inclusive. The trigger value of four ovigerous <i>L. salmonis</i> relates to the activation of the Emergency Plan, i.e. only in exceptional circumstances.
SNH	We maintain our advice that results from the wild fish monitoring should be used to inform management of the fish farms. Our aim is that the Management Group will share, review and discuss the results of the monitoring on an annual basis and, in future years, discuss using the results to review the trigger for enacting the Emergency Action Plan.	SSF cannot accept that it is reasonable to base farm management decisions on perceived trends in wild fish stocks which may be a) short-term/temporary, and b) completely unrelated to farm activities. SSF's proposed monitoring and Environmental Management Plan is robust and seeks to guide and control what is reasonable in terms of on-farm management actions, with stock welfare and wider biodiversity in mind.
SNH	We maintain our advice that monitoring sea lice on wild salmonids in the mouth of the river would add significant value to the monitoring and welcome SSFs agreement to consider this as part of future discussions within the Management Group.	Noted – but see below response to LDSFB/LFT concerning the potential difficulties with this.
LDSFB/LFT	The plan does not commit SSF to undertaking the necessary actions to ensure that sea lice levels on farm fish are kept within CoGP levels. The Critical Decision Flow Diagram includes the normal measures used to control lice on farms, which have not prevented the current high lice levels seen at the Nevis C site. The Emergency Action Plan will only be invoked if lice levels rise above 4 ovigerous females per fish, this is four times the COGP target for July-January and eight times the target for the most sensitive period from February to June. The risk to wild salmonids and freshwater pearl mussels is based on the absolute number of lice on the farm. With the proposed increase in biomass at the site, this would mean the emergency plan would only be used when absolute lice numbers on the farm were 6.5 times higher (or 13 times higher in the sensitive spring period) than if the current biomass were at CoGP levels.	Appendix 1 of the EMP sets out the critical decision flow for routine sea lice management which has been developed in light of experience to date. The measures described within this diagram include all of the options currently available to the industry for the control of sea lice. While these are normally sufficient to maintain sea-lice levels within CoGP limits, exceptions do occur from time to time; we have discussed the various factors which contributed to higher lice levels experienced in the last crop at Nevis, and the various mitigation measures now employed as a result.
LDSFB/LFT	Even if the Emergency Action Plan is triggered, it does not require any action to be taken, but rather states that options will be considered or evaluated. We	The Emergency Action Plan is designed to reduce numbers of ovigerous female lice to comply with COGP within one month of the plan being enacted,

	<p>would not expect any plan to prescribe a certain course of actions, since the best options are likely to depend on a number of factors. However, we would like to see an explicit commitment from SSF to use whatever measures necessary to bring lice levels down to CoGP targets within one month; the current wording in the EMP suggests this is only as aspiration. In order to achieve this we would like to see an undertaking that, in the event that all other measures have failed, a partial cull will be carried out to reduce the absolute number of lice on the site to the equivalent of the entire biomass meeting the CoCP target.</p>	<p>and this is clearly stated within the document. If all of the Emergency Plan options have failed to reduce overigous female lice levels, SSF will assess sustained harvesting of fish on a pen by pen basis, starting with pens with highest ovigerous female lice numbers, informed by continual monitoring of farm lice data. The proposal to reduce lice numbers/increase cleaner fish ratio through harvesting is stated in points 4 and 5 of the document.</p>
LDSFB/LFT	<p>the monitoring of lice levels on wild salmonids is not included in the EMP. We feel this is necessary to investigate any relationship between lice levels on wild and farmed fish and to interpret any trends seen in local wild fish populations. Given the importance of the local freshwater pearl mussel populations, we do not feel it is sufficient to rely on CoGP targets for farm lice numbers that were never designed to protect wild fish, have not been evaluated in this regard and do not consider absolute numbers of lice on the farm. If lice burdens on wild and farmed fish are monitored in Loch Nevis, it will allow specific targets to be produced in the future that are based on measured impacts on wild fish. The figure of £8k per year for monitoring proposed by SSF would be more than adequate to monitor both juvenile salmonid populations in the neighbouring river and lice burdens on wild sea trout post smolts in Loch Nevis (in fact we would estimate that this could be achieved for half the amount). Therefore, we do not feel that a requirement to monitor lice levels on wild fish would be disproportionate in this case.</p>	<p>Monitoring of sea lice on wild salmonids is not included at this stage but we have agreed to consider this as part of future discussions within the Management Group. This monitoring is inherently more difficult than population-level monitoring in the river system and the likelihood of gaining meaningful data (due to small sample size) would need to be considered. Our financial commitment is based on the anticipated likely cost of employing an independent contractor to carry out a robust assessment of wild fish population levels in the river.</p>
LDSFB/LFT	<p>In summary we feel that in order to provide adequate protection for wild fish the EMP should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -An Emergency Action Plan with an explicit commitment to reduce absolute lice levels on the farm to the equivalent of the relevant CoGP target -A lower trigger point for enactment of the Emergency Action Plan 	<p>The Emergency Action Plan is designed to achieve CoGP compliance within one month.</p> <p>The routine lice control measures described in the critical decisions flow diagram would normally be invoked at much lower levels, i.e. as soon as lice counts indicate that ovigerous female numbers are trending up towards CoGP levels. We would expect to have to activate the Emergency Action Plan in exceptional circumstances only, i.e. where normal control measures have failed, and we believe the trigger level of four ovigerous females per fish to be relatively precautionary in this respect, since it might still be possible at this level to bring lice numbers back down through routine control measures.”</p>

	<p>-Monitoring of lice burdens on wild fish and the analysis of these data with farm lice levels with the future aim of replacing CoGP treatment targets with ones specifically developed for Loch Nevis.</p>	<p>See comments above re. difficulty of monitoring this aspect and obtaining meaningful data. The design and analysis of any such monitoring would need to carefully consider the risk of interpreting correlation as causality where many environmental factors are involved.</p>
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