



Date: 10 February 2016

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Submission to the Independent Aquaculture Licence Review Group

We welcome the establishment by Minister Michael Creed TD of the independent review group on marine licencing in Ireland.

We are making this submission as the family of Damien Ó Ceallacháin. Damien was a pioneer of Irish Aquaculture and set up Muir Gheal Teo, a family run salmon farming business, in the 1980s. At a time when Fish Farming was a new industry in Ireland, Muir Gheal was one of the first companies to recognise the potential of Aquaculture. Muir Gheal developed a strong working relationship with the local community, creating employment where it was needed and providing important opportunities for other entrepreneurs to enter into this new market.

Understandably, as the industry was new to the country at the time, there were several bottlenecks and complex processes to abide by as governmental organisations put initial regulatory practices into place. However, over 30 years later, the lack of progressive change particularly in comparison with other European countries, is not only embarrassing, it is also highly disrespectful of the men and women who have dedicated their lives to a livelihood they believe in, and which has huge potential in terms of employment and improved quality of life in rural areas, but which their government has time and time again neglected.

While our family are not directly involved in farming fish anymore, we are still in contact with many of our friends and colleagues who are struggling within the confines of the primitive Irish licensing system. All that is required to enable the industry to sustainably grow, is a system that is user-friendly, practical, transparent to all stakeholders and which puts realistic timescales on all parties.

The government has identified aquaculture as a cornerstone of the Irish Food industry in both Bord Bia's Food Wise 2020 document and in the National Strategic Plan for Sustainable Aquaculture Development and aims to grow our production across all species to 45,000 tonnes. This upcoming review is a welcome commitment by the government to put in place an action plan to resolve licensing issues, removing the largest impediment to industry growth and enabling farmers and other actors in the aquaculture industry to grow their businesses in line with government aims.

We hope that the results of this review will highlight the need for immediate action, as well as continued dialogue, and we look forward to new processes being put in place and the resulting overdue growth in the Irish Seafood industry.

Yours Sincerely,

Joan O'Callaghan

On behalf of: Muireann Ní Cheallacháin, Aoibheann Ní Cheallacháin, Cliona Ní Cheallacháin, Michael Ó Ceallacháin.