



9<sup>th</sup> February 2017

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is David Corrigan. I am originally from the West Coast of Scotland and have recently relocated to the North West of Ireland with my partner where we purchased a bed and breakfast. My background in Scotland, in particular my employment, was in Aquaculture for almost thirty five years, focusing mainly on salmon farming. When I first embarked on fish farming in the early 1980s it was relatively easy to get employed and was an industry that most people did not take seriously and consequently staff turnover was incredibly high.

Here we are now in 2017 and it is one of the most sought after industries to be employed in, in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. This is in stark contrast to the fact that I almost gave up on this industry in the late 1980s and early 90s. Things in the industry were not good at that time, *e.g.* disease, sea lice, overstocking and various other challenges.

Back then it would have been easier to walk away. However, looking back at my last ten years, I and many others in similar circumstances are glad that we stayed, contributed and helped make the salmon farming industry the truly brilliant success story that it is today. I can mention things like salmon farming is the biggest single food export from Scotland, and that the industry employs over 10,000 employees both directly and indirectly. However, one of the most important factors close to me are the towns, villages, and small rural communities that benefit from salmon farming.

Not that very long ago, approximately ten to fifteen years, there were communities that were totally against salmon farming. The main reason for this, I would say, was suspicion and the old classic cliché of “I heard this and I heard that. And I read this and I read that”. To be fair maybe some of what they heard was true but as I say, there are always two, if not three, sides to every story. Nothing stays the same and we all have to accept change of some kind. I am pleased to say the aforementioned communities have adopted a more positive understanding of fish farming and the benefits that are gained, if done sustainably and sensibly. I am fully aware that my former employer, Marine Harvest Scotland, produced 50,000 tonnes of salmon per annum which was almost 20,000 tonnes short of customer demand. In what can only be described as a very fast moving world we all live in, retailers are demanding as they too have customers to provide for, and if the shortage of salmon cannot be sourced from the coastline of Scotland, then retailers will go elsewhere *e.g.* Norway, Chile, Canada and others.

Thankfully, moving forward, it is important to understand the needs of those companies, communities and cultures involved. Simple little things that we all take for granted such as communication, trust and change are contributing factors in making things work. Having the right people in the right place at the right time is key. These

elements were instrumental in the recent implementation of 5 new salmon farms on the West Coast of Scotland. The importance of the 40 full time jobs speaks for itself; giving families the opportunity to stay in the area they call home, supporting the village shop and keeping children in local schools, just to mention a few of the many benefits. As I mentioned earlier, salmon farms were an easy target for criticism, some of which was justifiable, particularly in the late 80s and early 90s when farms were located in areas unsuitable for farming. Issues such as poor depth, water quality, negative visual impact and noise pollution have all been addressed in recent years.

The industry has benefited from major financial investment: automation, new technology and medicines and, of vital importance, the right staff trained to the highest standards. As it stands today any new positions in salmon farming, whether advertised in the press or job centres, can attract up to 100 applications each.

One of the many roles that I was active in was to manage the only scientific research sea water salmon farm in the U.K. This gave me the opportunity to work alongside some of the world's leading scientists, professors, food nutritionists, Masters and Ph.D students. It also gave me a whole new outlook in the importance of food nutrition, food health and food safety. Whilst awareness of the health benefits of farmed salmon has improved in recent years, the majority of consumers have limited knowledge of the benefits of Omega 3, Omega 6 and Vitamin D gained from eating this product. I have heard so many times from members of the public and respected members of the media that the consumption of farmed salmon is not good for you and in some cases harmful. Such views could not be further from the truth.

My point is that if asked to choose between the view of the general public and the media, or the worlds leading food experts, I know which advice I would be taking. Much of my time was spent talking to anyone who was interested in listening, *e.g.* communities, local and national councillors, politicians and many others about such issues.

I am going to draw to a close shortly as you can imagine having almost 35 years experience in aquaculture I could go on and on. There are 2 key and vitally important factors that will bring my statement to a conclusion.

## **Regulation and Legislation**

Salmon farming is one of the most regulated and legislated food industries in the world. Of course this has a place in the food chain as legislation has a duty to protect and serve the public. However, just like fish farming, it has to be carried out in a sensible manner.

Just prior to my leaving Scotland for my new venture in Donegal, one of our administrators told me, which was not a shock or a surprise, that we had accommodated over 350 audits in 2015. Whilst elements of this auditing process are necessary, surely not to such excessive levels. Such auditing could, and should, be co-ordinated through a single authority.

In 2002 I was invited to address the Scottish parliament rural development committee to give an open and honest account of fish farming in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. The key point that I made to the Scottish parliament is very similar to what I would like to make regarding the review of the Irish aquaculture licensing process. In 2002 Marine Harvest Scotland's parent company, Nutreco, had made

available £100 million for the construction of 4 new fish farm sites, pending permission. I'm sad to say that after 5 years of bottlenecks, paperwork, legislation, regulation and too many parties involved, they pulled out and invested the money into Marine Harvest Norway, who successfully opened up 3 new farms within 14 months. What was lost to Scotland, and to what can only be described as sensitive rural communities, was 25 full time jobs. It is difficult to quantify other benefits and spin offs that would have also helped these communities. My advice, for what it is worth, is that if there is an offer of funding from parent companies, within or outside of Ireland, that will enhance fragile rural communities, then work with these companies to make it happen. Learn from the mistakes that were made in Scotland and avoid the disappointment of missing a golden opportunity to create full time permanent jobs in Ireland. Invariably this would also bring opportunities to strengthen towns, villages and communities on the West Coast of Ireland.

## **Education**

I was the founder member of the Marine Harvest Scotland schools educational programme, which was presented to over 15,000 teachers, pupils and students. This was a very rewarding experience and to this day I am seeing and hearing that a substantial number of these former pupils and students are now employed in the salmon farming industry.

I hope that I have given a worthwhile, open and honest account of my own experience in the aquaculture industry. If you feel that I may be able assist further, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

David Corrigan

