

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 10 February 2017 17:03
To: aquaculturereview
Subject: Aquaculture Consultation

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To Whom it May Concern

As a fish producer and managing director of a rural based business I and the employees of my companies have a direct and real interest in the sustainable development of the Irish Aquaculture Sector. We certainly welcome the establishment of the Independent review group on licencing by Minister Michael Creed T.D

The whole issue of licencing has been the greatest obstacle to the development of jobs and indeed any certainty in coastal areas in the fish production and processing sector in Ireland for more than twenty years now. It is pure contradictory to think that on the one hand that, ideas such as Food Wise 1025 and the National Strategic Plan for sustainable Aquaculture Development can be moved on whilst those who would be the driving force behind such ideas are being hampered at every opportunity. The industry cannot grow in the present environment because the people who may be interested in driving it have no confidence to invest or move it to another level unless there is some positive movement on licencing and indeed a healthier attitude towards this industry in general.

I got involved in Aquaculture in the early 1980's after completing a 3 year course in Aquatic Biology at GMIT. I was initially involved in the production of oysters and mussels in Clifden, Co Galway. In these days department officials would visit at least once maybe twice a year to see how we were progressing and to offer valuable advise. How things have changed since then!!

In 1985 I along with a brother set up Connemara Fisheries. This company continued to produce oysters and mussels and later in 1988 set up a smoked salmon plant in Corrnamonga, Co Galway. This company is still operating and employs 6 full time staff with some part time workers.

In 1994 I set up the company Derrylea Holdings Ltd. This company is solely involved in salmon parr and smolt production. This company has 9 full time staff employed with some part time workers.

It is with this company that we have encountered most of our issues and mainly with licencing and unrealistic regulation.

We like all the other salmon producers are organically certified. This in itself involves running a very transparent and environmentally friendly business whereby strict measures have to be adhered to. Under this measure we are annually audited and can be subject to spot checks at any time.

This industry is more regulated and monitored than any other industry of similar nature that I am aware of. There appears to be a peculiar concept in some quarters that the aquaculture sector should function without any environmental impact. This of course cannot be the case nor is it true of any other industry or activity. I believe it is the level of consequence to the environment and how it is managed that is important. We are monitored on a monthly basis in this regard.

What is however most frustrating for some time now is the constant kicking of the can down the road? When we feel the boxes are ticked, there appears to be some other issue. Eventually this becomes demoralising. A situation appears to have developed over the years whereby the trenches were drawn. This has resulted in stalemate and no real movement of significance with regard to licencing . It is important that there is more engagement between members of the aquaculture sector and some designated officials from the Dept of Marine with a view to moving this on at a reasonable pace. I believe the Dept should be there to help enhance the industry where possible and assist in dealing with issues which can arise relating to licencing in particular.

In its current state it is almost impossible to draw up ant long term plan and give some certainty to employees and service industries. We cannot avail of grant support or make proposals to financial institutions with any degree of confidence.

The employees of my company are all relatively young with mortgages and in some cases young families. These people are dependent on our success going forward. However I cannot in the present circumstances convey to these people that their positions are secure for any great length of time.

I sincerely hope that the setting up of the review group will be the start of a new and positive approach to the whole licencing dilemma we find ourselves in.

Yours sincerely

Paul Summerville