

Deirdre Morgan – Secretary to the Independent Review Group,
Department of Aquaculture Food and the Marine National Seafood Centre,
Clonakilty,
Co. Cork.



08/02/2017

Dear Licence Review Committee Members,

My name is Michelle Hay, I live in [REDACTED] Co. Donegal and like hundreds of others in Donegal, I am employed by Marine Harvest. I work as a Technical Support Supervisor and even though I'm based in [REDACTED] Co. Donegal, I travel the country to all our sites throughout Donegal, Mayo, Kerry and Cork. I have been working for Marine Harvest for 2.5 years and have worked in the Environmental/Aquatic sectors for more than 12 years.

Marine Harvest is the single largest employer in our area and it could employ more if the capacity was there, but Marine Harvest, and other companies, are curtailed by the current licencing restrictions and lack of movement and decision making by the “powers that be”.

I never thought I could get work related to my educational background so close to home and many times before I've left Ireland to work abroad due to lack of employment in rural areas. People always joked when I started college that I was only getting educated to leave, as it was always an impression that there were very few jobs locally that required degrees. I completed a B.Sc. (Hons) in Analytical Science at LYIT and a M.Sc. in Environmental Science in TCD. The more education I received the more I became aware that my options in Donegal were becoming limited. It's a sad reflection that by gaining an education and bettering ourselves that we can find it difficult to find rural employment.

I am lucky to have full time employment with Marine Harvest due to the nature and variety of my work but I see many other colleagues that do not have the same security due to lack of fish and the production plant not being able to operate full time. When I started in Marine Harvest I had been bouncing about from part time contracts having previously worked for Donegal County Council, worked as an Ocean Observer through the Marine Institute on

board research vessels, Northern Regional Fishery Board/Inland Fisheries Ireland, Northern Ireland Water and Marine Scotland.

After starting with Marine Harvest on a temporary basis to cover Maternity Leave, I was offered a full time position. This opportunity came at the same time as the company were telling all the production staff that the factory was going to have to close for 6 weeks after Christmas. As I felt jubilant about securing a job, I had to hide my gratitude because of the number of colleagues who were devastated facing a Christmas that was being followed by a period of unemployment. People worried about paying bills, mortgages; a few even took the decision to leave and people left for Scotland, England and Canada to have consistent employment.

After taking up my current role, I have been given lots of experience, training and responsibility. I can see my career progressing through the company, which I didn't have when I was working from one temporary contract to another. Marine Harvest has paid for me to do many expensive courses to expand my knowledge which adds to my personal development.

The socio-economic impacts of the lack of jobs is woven into the fabric of our society. I feel blessed to have the opportunity to stay at home, I love my community and never wanted to have to leave to work elsewhere because I was missing out. I have always been very community focused having worked with Youth Groups, the local Resource Centre, spent time volunteering for the Civil Defence, local defibrillator responder group and have been very heavily involved with the Irish Coast Guard for 15 years. Not having the opportunity to work at home meant missing out on some of these things.

Unfortunately, there is still not enough work in the area as all the men in my family have had to move away to work with one brother managing to get work in Dublin while the others have had to go to the England. I see first-hand the effects that this has on our rural communities, how what's left of my family rally around to try to help each other but there is no replacing the fact that my two nieces are growing up with their father working in London, only getting home periodically and missing out on so much of their lives. Last night I was talking to another friend that feels like a single mother as she raises 3 children because her

husband is working in England and Wales. It affects so many families who would like the opportunity to stay together and work locally.

Even our local football club struggles for players to field a team and for a few years flew one of my brothers home from Scotland and England at weekend for matches because so many of the younger people have no other option but to move away. Everyone understands the vicious circle of people leaving an area, therefore there aren't as many people shopping locally, eating out, going to pubs, hairdressers... so local business suffers. People being out of work and strapped for cash leads to worry about paying mortgages and bills, reductions in spending and a stagnation of currency movement. By being able to have more employment, it reduces these impacts.

Through work, we regularly have people coming to visit, from trades men, auditors, customers, trainers, etc and this helps to sustain tertiary employment in the hotels, shops and restaurants. We work with many subcontractors who would not be able to sustain their businesses, e.g. local laundry service, hauliers, maintenance/trade professionals, who depend on Marine Harvest as a staple employer.

I am an active fly angler, and have had the honour of representing Ireland in competition so I am familiar with the anglers viewpoint on aquaculture; I worked as a Fishery Officer and am aware of that stance and view point also, but I have the privilege from seeing the industry from all sides. I would often debate the pros and cons with my former colleagues and angling partners and explain to them that aquaculture is really no different from agriculture, it's just newer. I see first-hand the restrictions that are in place to ensure that we comply with various pieces of legislation to protect the environment, to be accountable for our actions and be conscious of our work and effects.

Our company has documentation and practices in place that covers all our activities from Organic to GMO free policies, training and investment in continuous improvement for infrastructure, equipment, processes, feed, chemicals, and staff training. We are always improving, always trying to enhance our systems and move our business forward with new information and new technology. As we operate from farm to fork, we can trace our fish back to the broodstock that they came from, the feed that they were given, any other treatments if required but strive to use the most environmentally friendly options like freshwater and

cleaner fish. Some people have a bad impression of our activities but part of this can be from a lack of understanding; once explained, many are more content when they can visualise the process and compare it to a known entity.

Marine Harvest completes annual benthic monitoring of all our marine sites, we complete other water monitoring and comply with local authority discharge licences, we have specific limits and deadlines for our monitoring which is passed on to the relevant departments/bodies. By being compliant with all environmental and other criteria required, it should demonstrate that it is in our own best interests to work to best practices and protect the environment that we are dependent on.

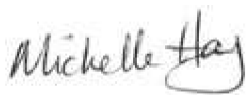
Part of our problem now is that we can't expand due to lack of revision of old licences and processing of new licences. I have environmental records back to the 1980's in my office to show the amount of information and detail we gather on the environment and our effect on it. We are signed up to many external certification bodies and go through numerous external audits every year to demonstrate our compliance. By being restricted by the government from the opportunity to expand we are unable to allow for more fallowing of sites and bays, we are unable to increase the stock to allow for more production to keep staff employed full time and we are unable to spread the stock so that we can adjust for all year around work. The delays in Aquaculture licencing are having a negative impact on our business, which affects each and every one of us.

It is over 6 years ago since Marine Harvest applied for a new licence at Shot Head in Cork, to date, this has not been finalised and I think that it is ridiculous that a more appropriate time scale for such issues is not put in place. The company spent a lot of time and money collating the data required for the submission, which must only have been passed from desk to desk with no one being held responsible for completing the process in a timely fashion.

Aquaculture is thriving in other European countries, why not here. Agriculture has limits, fishing has quotas and a limited stock to fish from, aquaculture is not being maximised to its full potential. Marine Harvest produces a high end product, with approximately 85% of our produce being exported. There are frequent political debates about trying to increase exports to improve the economy, but there is no visible action to help companies like ours to expand and grow.

If the roles were reversed and we were given a specific task to complete, there would be rules, guidelines and deadlines. I cannot comprehend why this isn't the case for the Government Departments and officials who are not held to task for lack of completion. I have no issue with the information that is required to apply for licences and by having experts review the information to ensure that companies are working with best regard to best practices, but it is infuriating that there is not more transparency in the process from the Governments side. I am delighted that there is a review of the process and that there is now the possibility of making the process more efficient.

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michelle Hay". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'H'.

Michelle Hay