

“AQUACULTURE – A POSSIBLE WINDOW OF HOPE?”

SNP MEP Ian Hudghton says that fish farming could provide a “window of hope” to Scotland’s fishing communities, at a time where Scotland’s fishing industries is confronted with the biggest crisis in its history. The SNP member of the EP’s Fisheries Committee believes Scotland could become a world leader in aquaculture, providing much needed employment opportunities for those forced from the seas. Mr Hudghton says this can only happen when the Commission takes account of crucial challenges facing fish farming, and the urgent need to take a tough stance on multi-national companies dumping poor quality farmed fish from non-EU countries. Speaking in the Martin debate on “Aquaculture in the European Union: Present and Future”, Mr Hudghton said:

“With fish stocks in crisis, sea areas closed, fishermen being forced to tie-up or decommission, and access restrictions being thrown to the wind, aquaculture may offer a window of hope to some fisheries dependent communities. However, in order to promote aquaculture and ensure that it is properly regulated, an effective, well thought strategy is essential.

In Scotland, aquaculture is well developed but has been confronted with frequent challenges. For example, infectious salmon anaemia recently led to the full-scale slaughter of entire stocks on some fish farms. But, Scotland is also an example to follow – in the wake of ISA, fish farmers have led the way in adhering to an ISA Code, particularly important in light of the lack of EU funding for compensation for vaccine.

Any aquaculture strategy must ensure that aquaculture is a sustainable, competitive and economically viable activity, which takes into account environmental and social concerns, including the need to prevent escapes and sustainable fish feed, and the need for high quality and safe fish. There must be a resounding no to genetically modified fish.

The EU has all-too-often put aquaculture on a backburner. Now with investigations into complaints against dumping by Chilean and Faeroese importers, operated by multinationals, the EU market faces swamping by fish originating from countries where regulatory controls are far below the minimum levels required within the EU. In addition, the Norway-EU salmon agreement is set to end on 28 February. The challenges for EU fish farmers are mounting, with little hope of relief.

That is why I am calling on the Commission to ensure that dumping investigations are fully pursued and the Norway-EU salmon agreement maintained. The EU must ensure a level playing field for its own fish farmers – imports from third countries which do not maintain the same standards, for example with respect to ISA, sustainable feed, and other quality and environmental concerns must be prohibited.

The Commission must throw fisheries dependent communities a lifeline."