AP2-13-26

National Anglers Representative Association

Appeal of Decision to Grant and Aquaculture Licence for Site T06-6021 Deenish Island. EIA Portal Number 2021027

Introduction and scope of appeal

The National Anglers Representative Association (NARA) appeals the decision to grant an aquaculture licence for site T06-202 at Deenish Island.

NARA's concern is that the decision-making record does not provide a sufficiently clear and convincing evidential basis for the conclusion that the proposed development will not give rise to significant adverse effects on wild fisheries, including Atlantic salmon and sea trout.

In particular, the appeal raises issues concerning the treatment of sea-lice and disease risks, cumulative effects, hydrodynamic modelling, the production assumptions used in the assessment, the recorded mortality history of the relevant sites, and the application of the precautionary approach.

NARA reserves the right, subject to the applicable statutory provisions and the procedures of the Aquaculture Licences Appeals Board, to supplement these grounds, submit additional evidence and address matters arising from the appeal record or from further scientific or factual material that becomes available.

2. Wild fisheries: the absence of significant effects has not been sufficiently established

The Minister's determination records the conclusion that no significant effects arise in relation to wild fisheries. NARA submits that the evidence supporting that conclusion requires closer examination.

The assessment identifies several recognised routes by which an intensive open-net salmon farm could affect wild salmonids, including sea lice, disease and pathogen transmission, the use of therapeutants, and genetic effects associated with escaped farmed salmon. Concerns on these issues were also raised by Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI).

The question for the Board is therefore whether the available evidence is sufficiently robust to support the conclusion reached, rather than whether potential pathways of impact can simply be identified. NARA considers that the final determination should explain more fully how the identified risks to wild Atlantic salmon and sea trout were examined and resolved.

NARA accordingly asks the Board to review the underlying evidence and reasoning on wild fisheries and to ensure that the conclusion is supported by the evidence rather than by the conclusion itself.

3. Inland Fisheries Ireland concerns require clear resolution

NARA considers the submissions of Inland Fisheries Ireland to be particularly important because IFI is the State body with responsibility for the protection, management and conservation of inland fisheries and the inland fisheries resource.

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IFI raised specific issues concerning sea lice, wild Atlantic salmon, sea trout and the adequacy of the assessment. Among other matters, IFI questioned whether the existing monitoring and treatment arrangements provide adequate protection for wild salmonids and emphasised the importance of total stocking and production when considering lice pressure.

IFI also referred to the NASCO objective that salmon farms should be managed so that there is no increase in lice loads or lice-induced mortality of wild salmonids attributable to farms, and considered that the documentation did not clearly demonstrate that this objective had been met.

NARA does not suggest that disagreement between public bodies determines the outcome of the appeal. However, where an expert State body identifies specific scientific issues capable of giving rise to reasonable scientific doubt, the decision record should demonstrate how those issues were considered and resolved.

NARA therefore asks the Board to identify the evidential basis on which the material concerns raised by IFI were accepted, rejected or otherwise addressed.

4. Production assumptions and the Deenish mortality record

NARA has particular concern about the mortality assumption used in the proposed production model.

The EIA states that mortality over the production cycle is estimated at 19.2%. The proposed model provides for approximately 650,000 smolts, a maximum biomass of approximately 2,177 tonnes and a total harvest of approximately 2,672 tonnes.

The recorded mortality history for Deenish is materially higher:

- EIA forecast: 19.2%
- 2013–14: 36.4%
- 2015–17: 45.8%
- 2017–19: 23.9%
- 2019–21: 28.9%

Each documented production cycle identified above exceeded the mortality assumption used in the proposed model. In the 2015–17 cycle, recorded mortality was more than twice the forecast rate.

NARA considers this difference significant because mortality is not merely a production statistic. It may provide evidence relevant to disease pressure, biological stress, fish welfare and the suitability of the site for the proposed scale of operation.

The appeal material should therefore explain why a 19.2% mortality assumption is considered a realistic basis for forecasting future performance at Deenish and what the environmental implications would be if mortality were again to approach the levels recorded historically.

5. Disease, mortality and the wider Kenmare Bay context

The mortality record should also be considered in the wider context of salmon-farming operations within Kenmare Bay. The EIA recognises that mortality affects the requirements for removal of dead fish and that significant mortality events can have implications for pollution and disease risk.

The available material concerning Inishfarnard records historic mortality of approximately 46.19%, 49.9% and 44.1% in identified production cycles, together with reported mortality numbers of 104,057 fish in 2024 and 404,788 fish in 2025.

Taken together, the Deenish and Inishfarnard records are relevant empirical evidence concerning the biological performance of intensive open-net salmon farming in this marine environment.

NARA considers that the assessment should demonstrate how this operational history has informed the analysis of disease and pathogen pressure, environmental suitability, treatment requirements, mortality handling, organic loading, fish welfare, biosecurity, and the practical effectiveness of mitigation measures during periods of elevated mortality.

In NARA's view, future performance should not be assessed solely by reference to proposed management measures and intended operating conditions where the actual history of the sites provides relevant evidence against which those assumptions can be tested.

6. Sea lice and cumulative effects on wild salmonids

NARA considers that compliance with a numerical lice-management threshold should not, by itself, be treated as proof that an operation will have no ecological effect on wild salmonids.

The relevant assessment must consider whether the proposed operation, both individually and in combination with other salmon farms, could adversely affect wild Atlantic salmon and sea trout.

IFI specifically identified total stocking and production as relevant to the assessment of lice pressure. The in-combination assessment also recognises that parasites such as sea lice and disease can give rise to cumulative effects.

NARA considers that the documentation should provide a sufficiently clear quantitative assessment of cumulative lice exposure. In particular, the analysis should explain the relationship between total farmed biomass, lice abundance, reproductive output, larval dispersal, the timing and routes of wild smolt migration, and the resulting exposure of wild salmonids.

Geographical separation between farms, or between individual dispersal areas, does not necessarily resolve the issue because the receptor of concern—migrating wild salmon—is mobile.

NARA asks the Board to require clear evidence addressing whether cumulative lice pressure from the relevant farms can be excluded as a potential adverse effect on migrating wild salmonids.

7. Hydrodynamic modelling and in-combination assessment

The hydrodynamic evidence warrants particular attention because conclusions concerning dispersal and interaction between farms depend on the reliability of the underlying water-movement information.

A preliminary Marine Institute review in 2022 noted that the hydrographic study dated from 2010 and recommended that the model be updated using more recent data.

NARA considers that the appeal record should establish whether that updating was subsequently carried out and, if so, what information was incorporated. The Board should also be satisfied as to the use of new field measurements, independent validation, wind and surface-current data,

biologically realistic assumptions concerning lice behaviour, and the timing and routes of wild salmon and sea-trout migration.

This is relevant both to the assessment of Deenish itself and to the conclusions reached regarding in-combination effects with other farms.

The Marine Institute's preliminary review also identified inconsistencies concerning cage dimensions, cubic capacity, mesh sizes, site boundaries, and production/fallowing arrangements. NARA considers it important that the Board satisfy itself that all material discrepancies identified during that review were fully resolved before the final EIA and Appropriate Assessment were relied upon.

8. Appropriate Assessment and the precautionary standard

The Appropriate Assessment proceeded to Stage 2 because significant effects could not be excluded at screening. The final conclusion therefore requires a sufficiently complete and reliable scientific basis for excluding adverse effects on the integrity of the relevant European sites.

NARA considers that the following matters need to be assessed together rather than treated as isolated issues:

- the scientific basis for the sea-lice thresholds relied upon;
- cumulative lice production and exposure;
- disease and pathogen risks;
- the concerns raised by IFI;
- the currency and adequacy of hydrodynamic modelling;
- the condition and vulnerability of relevant wild salmon populations;
- potential effects on wild sea trout;
- the scale of the proposed increase in production;
- the actual mortality experience at Deenish and Inishfarnard; and
- the difference between the 19.2% mortality assumption and the substantially higher mortality recorded repeatedly at Deenish.

The central issue is whether, when these matters are considered collectively, the evidence is sufficiently complete, precise and reliable to support the conclusion that adverse effects can be excluded without reasonable scientific doubt.

NARA also asks the Board to consider whether the conclusion depends materially on assumptions about future performance, regulatory compliance and mitigation that have not been adequately reconciled with the actual operational history of the sites.

9. Economic value of wild salmon and sea-trout angling

NARA considers that the economic assessment should take account of the value of wild salmon and sea-trout angling alongside the employment and economic activity associated with the proposed aquaculture development.

Wild salmon and sea-trout angling support a range of local economic activity, including angling guides and ghillies, accommodation providers, restaurants and pubs, tackle shops, transport services

and other tourism businesses. These effects can be particularly relevant in rural communities where alternative economic opportunities may be limited.

The Waterville/Currane salmon and sea-trout fishery has historically attracted visiting anglers and generated economic activity beyond the immediate fishery. IFI also raised concerns regarding possible consequences for wild salmon and sea trout and associated socioeconomic effects.

NARA therefore considers that the public-interest assessment should examine both the economic benefits claimed for aquaculture and the economic value that could potentially be affected by further deterioration in wild salmonid stocks and associated angling activity.

Where adverse effects on those stocks have not been satisfactorily excluded, the economic assessment should not assume that the aquaculture proposal represents a net economic benefit without accounting for potentially displaced or lost recreational-angling and tourism value.

10. Relief sought

For the reasons set out above, NARA asks the Aquaculture Licences Appeals Board to set aside the decision to grant the licence and to refuse the application.

NARA further asks the Board to give full consideration to the submissions and scientific concerns raised by Inland Fisheries Ireland and to the actual operational and mortality history of Deenish and the other relevant Kenmare Bay salmon-farming operations.

NARA reserves the right, insofar as permitted by the applicable legislation and the procedures of the Aquaculture Licences Appeals Board, to develop or supplement these grounds, submit additional scientific or factual evidence, and address any further relevant matters arising during the appeal.



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