**PQ Ref: 20098/19**

**Reply By**

**12 noon on Wednesday 8th May**

**TD Asking**

**Catherine Connolly**

**Date for reply to Oireachtas**

**9/05/2019**

**To ask the Minister for Agriculture; Food and the Marine the number and location of organic salmon farms requested to accelerate harvesting in view of concerns in relation to high sea lice levels on their farms; the number and location of other farms with levels of sea lice that are of concern; the actions being taken to address and resolve these issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter.**

**BRIEFING NOTE**

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1. **Sea Lice Control Protocols**

The control protocols for the management of sea lice are operated by the Marine Institute on behalf of the State.  All stocks of fish are inspected by Marine Institute Inspectors on 14 occasions throughout the year. As part of this control strategy farm operators are required to undertake treatments to control lice infestation levels once certain trigger levels are reached.

Mechanical methods of delousing are currently used in combating instances of Sea Lice. In addition, several species of cleaner fish are used in Ireland as a method of controlling sea lice. The cleaner fish supplement their diet by removing and eating the lice. This biological method of control is very effective and can reduce the reliance on medicines to control sea lice.

All of the medicines used for lice control in Ireland are PoMs (prescription only medicines) which can only be used under Veterinary supervision and their use is regulated by the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA). This was the case in the three instances cited in the reply to the PQ.

In certain circumstances treatments alone may not be the most appropriate strategy and in a number of limited circumstances an accelerated harvest may be required.

These protocols are more advanced than those operated in other jurisdictions for the following reasons:

* The inspection regime is totally independent of the industry.
* Data obtained as a result of inspection is published and made widely available.
* Treatment trigger levels are set at a low level.

The sea lice monitoring and control programme in Ireland has been acknowledged by the Environment Directorate (DG Environment) of the EU Commission as representing international best practice.

1. **January to April 2019**

Four monthly reports have issued by the Marine Institute to date in 2019. The reports indicate the issuance of 15 Notices to Treat due to Elevated Sea Lice levels across seven different sites. The sites are in Ardmore, in Kilkieran Bay (1); Inver Bay (2); Ballinakill Harbour (1); Killary Habour (1); Mulroy Bay (1); Lough Swilly (1).

Accelerated harvests were undertaken at three sites in the following bays:

Kilkieran Bay; (December/January Report)

Ballinakill Harbour;

Inver Bay.

1. **Correspondence from Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment**

There has been some controversy recently in respect of correspondence issued by the Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment (DCCAE)

Following the recent standard dissemination of the Marine Institute’s sea lice report for March 2019, DCCAE forwarded a series of specific queries to this Department in respect of the control of sea lice at specific aquaculture sites. These queries were formulated by both DCCAE and Inland Fisheries Ireland.

The Department referred the queries to the Marine Institute for assessment and comment. As part of their detailed and site specific response, the Marine Institute concluded that the measures taken by the salmon farms at each site have been effective in the control of sea lice infestation on farmed Atlantic salmon in the Spring period.

The detailed response of the Marine Institute was forwarded to DCCAE on 11 April.

1. **Sea Lice Control – Transparency of Procedures**

As indicated above the sea lice controls in Ireland are more advanced than those in other jurisdictions for the following reasons.

-        The inspection regime is totally independent of the industry.

 -        Data obtained as a result of inspection is published and made widely available.

 -        Treatment trigger levels are set at a low level.

In addition to the above the Marine Institute publishes on an annual basis a National Survey of Sea Lice on Fish Farms in Ireland report.

**ENDS**