

Galway Bay fish farm criticised for environment and wild salmon risks

By Martina Nee

A storm is brewing over a large scale Galway Bay fish farm with opposition groups rubbishing earlier claims that the project will be a jobs and local economy boost saying it will instead lead to an environmental disaster, adversely affecting wild salmon stocks, and actually posing a risk to existing jobs.

Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM) made an announcement last month that the licence [application](#) for the deep sea salmon farm located at Inis Oírr, Galway Bay, has moved into the public consultation phase. The project was lauded not only by BIM but also local representatives for its potential to produce 15,000 tonnes of organic-certified salmon, an output that would be gradually built up over a six year period and result in the creation of more than 500 jobs as well as injecting €14.5 million into the local economy.

Environmental Impact Statement has no credibility, says angling group

However the Galway City Salmon Angling Association has this week spoken out about the possible risks the project poses. Secretary for the group, Billy Smyth, called into [question](#) the credibility of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) which was released as part of the public consultation process.

"We believe that an EIS for a salmon farm this size which will turn out to be an environmental disaster should have been carried out by a competent independent body and not the people seeking the licence." He said that a farm which has the capacity to produce 3.6 million salmon to full size would cause serious pollution to Galway Bay due to the level of excrement and waste feed deposited. Local anglers are also concerned about the affect that sea lice would have on wild salmon stocks in areas such as Spiddal, Kilcolgan, Clarinbridge, and the Corrib River systems.

"BIM tells us there will be no pesticide used on this farm to control sea lice. If this is the case then sea lice will be [free](#) to breed out of control in a short period of time as they will have millions of hosts to breed on, producing millions of larvae that salmon smolts migrating outward from Galway rivers will have to pass through."

Mr Smyth pointed to research which shows that "the escape of hatchery bred salmon from this and other farms" puts wild salmon at risk. "Inland Fisheries Ireland will from this year not be restocking Irish rivers with hatchery reared smolts so why would BIM put our wild salmon stocks at risk from a catastrophe like what happened on Christmas Eve last off the Shetland Isles when a storm wrecked a smaller salmon farm to this one being applied for and 300,000 salmon of harvestable size escaped into the [open](#) sea or perished in the cages. When and not if this happens in Galway Bay wild salmon stocks on the west coast of Ireland could then be at risk resulting in the loss of thousands of our hard won sustainable jobs in the tourist angling industry. BIM have grossly exaggerated the amount of jobs this salmon farm will create."

Inland Fisheries Ireland criticises lack of relevant research on sea lice impact

These concerns have been echoed by the Friends of the Irish Environment (FIS) who have highlighted a submission made by the Government agency body Inland Fisheries Ireland which criticises EIS. FIS accuses the EIS of containing many statements which are not supported by research and highlights the absence of relevant research. The IFI state "no data is provided on the known migration routes of salmonids to support BIM's claim that there is a 'very low to zero risk of farmed salmon sea lice infecting wild salmon', that 'the extensive literature published on interactions of sea trout and salmon lice in Ireland are not referred to or discussed', and that sea lice issues are 'a legitimate concern in this proposal'. The IFI has called for "a full monitoring system" to be [put](#) in place and a "baseline study" to be undertaken.

A submission made by An Taisce also expressed concerns for the impact of sea lice on wild populations of salmonids including Atlantic salmon and sea trout. In its response BIM said the assertion that the Environment Impact Assessment has not accurately assessed this impact is "not grounded in fact". It said that studies sponsored by The Marine Institute are "comprehensive, and demonstrate clearly that the proposed development, by virtue of its location and stringent sea lice management regime, is highly unlikely to have any significant impact on migratory salmonids in Galway Bay". BIM also said that a baseline study is "clearly unnecessary" as extensive studies have already been carried out.