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Responsibility

New definition for sustainable finfish farming could be 'foundation stone' for UK aquaculture

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By Responsible Seafood Advocate

New definition based on 35 hours of interviews with aquaculture experts and stakeholders

The Sustainable Aquaculture Innovation Centre (SAIC) is calling on UK aquaculture "to embrace and further develop a new conceptual framework that could underpin a sustainable future for the sector."

As part of her recent Master's dissertation research at the University of St. Andrews, SAIC CEO Heather Jones has created a new definition of a sustainable approach to UK finfish farming. This was developed following 35 hours of interviews with dozens of aquaculture experts and stakeholders, drawing on deep knowledge of aquaculture at the national to global levels.

"Sustainability is a loose concept that a lot of people use, but it can mean very different things," said Jones. "Given its central role in the future of aquaculture, it was imperative to provide a considered, all-encompassing definition, with a high degree of consensus, of what it means for finfish farming in the UK. It was particularly important to ensure it was informed by insights from many of the people who best know the sector."



New definition of a sustainable approach to UK finfish farming was developed by SAIC CEO, Heather Jones (above), and could be a 'foundation stone' for the future of aquaculture. Photo by Chris Watt.

Among its key themes, the definition touches on the important role finfish farming plays in providing a high-quality source of protein as an integral part of the food system. The top issues to be addressed under the sustainability banner are environmental concerns – including minimizing carbon emissions; prioritizing animal health and welfare; and the key contribution feed sustainability makes to helping achieve national targets for Net Zero.

A promotional banner for AquaBounty. On the left, a dark blue bar contains the text "SUSTAINABILITY NEVER TASTED SO GOOD" in white. In the center is a photograph of a cooked salmon fillet garnished with lemon slices and green herbs on a white plate. On the right, the AquaBounty logo is displayed in blue, with a white button below it that says "DISCOVER WHY".

(<https://aquabounty.com/>).

The definition has been endorsed by the SAIC board, which includes respected individuals from across aquaculture and academia. It is already being adapted and adopted by various organizations with an interest in the sector.

“With so much buy-in already, we hope this will become a foundation stone of our work to enhance the environmental and economic sustainability of the finfish sector,” said Jones. “But it is not an answer in itself – so we want the Scottish Government, sector companies, academics and the wider stakeholder community to build on this starting point.”

Ultimately, it is all about consumers having confidence in the quality of the food they eat.

While the definition is initially specific to finfish production in the UK, SAIC expressed interest in collaborating with the UK shellfish and seaweed sectors, as well as with global aquaculture sectors about developing the definition for their circumstances.

“Ultimately, it is all about consumers having confidence in the quality of the food they eat – in this case, salmon and trout,” said Jones. “Like any good definition, it should evolve and improve over time and there is a potentially broader value from this research through the creation of definitions for other sectors within aquaculture, as well as globally.”

The development of a definition for sustainable finfish farming comes ahead of Marine Scotland publishing its 'Vision for Scottish Aquaculture' in the next few months, which will outline the sector's direction of travel for the years ahead.

Read the full definition below.

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A new definition of a sustainable approach to UK finfish farming:

“A sustainable approach to farming finfish in the UK operates over the foreseeable long term* to produce high-quality food that is safe to eat, accessible to consumers, and provides omega 3 micronutrients essential for human life. The sector is valued for the wide-ranging and shared national benefits it provides in terms of societal health, fair employment, financial stability, and prosperity for individuals, businesses, and communities, and for its adoption of new technologies to minimize negative environmental impacts.

“Prioritizing animal health and welfare, it converts ethically and sustainably sourced inputs into beneficial outputs, whilst minimizing waste across the global supply chain. It pursues net-zero greenhouse gas emissions in producing food. It uses resources efficiently and effectively, without

causing cumulative irreversible harm over the long term. It monitors, manages, minimizes and mitigates local environmental impacts within agreed and acceptable levels. It adapts to climate change, and seeks to enhance biodiversity and ecosystems, either directly in the vicinity of farms, or indirectly via displacement, reducing impacts associated with alternative forms of food production.

“Management of the sector draws on the best available scientific data and ethical understandings to co-produce knowledge that commands the confidence of society. Governance systems are fair, coherent, participative, transparent and trusted. They respond to evolving consumer expectations around food sustainability, and to the views of local communities and wider society, from which social licence to operate derives. Collaborative investment in innovation, technology and skills enables the sector to

continuously improve, operating at the cutting edge of farming and regulatory practice, demonstrating global leadership in aquaculture.”

****Foreseeable long term defined as a human lifetime of 80-100 years”***

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