30th January 2014

Yesterday I attended the Argyll & Bute Council planning committee hearing for the new Dawnfresh site at Sailean Ruadh (Etive 6).

Just to recap, originally Dawnfresh applied for a 2500T site with the plan of closing an existing site near the mouth of River Awe, however the council advised them this was too big a farm and they should apply for a smaller farm.

Dawnfresh then applied for a 1500T site with no consolidation of existing sites, and the Argyll DSFB objected on the grounds that this posed an increased risk to wild salmon and sea trout.

Argyll & Bute Council’s policy for this area of the loch under the Integrated Coastal Zone Management is that there should be no new aquaculture sites unless other sites within the policy zone are closed (due to the capacity of the landscape to take more industrialisation).  Therefore the council recommended to the planning committee that planning permission should only be granted if Dawnfresh permanently close sites Ardchatten (Etive 5) and Inverawe East (Etive 1) under what is known as a section 75 condition.  Planning permission is not granted until Dawnfresh get legal confirmation that the sites have been permanently closed, and they have 4 months in which to get the agreements or planning permission expires.

On the face on things, Dawnfresh have got planning permission for this new site, however closing Etives 1 and 5 will not be easy.  Dawnfresh do not hold the leases to these sites, and from what was said yesterday at the hearing, neither of the leaseholders want to give up the leases.  Also, getting agreements to close the sites within 4 months will be a tall order, and it seems that A & B Council are not minded to grant an extension to this time without a very good reason.

This is the first time that a Section 75 condition has been put on a fish farm application, and I hope it sets a precedent that we can use to protect wild fisheries in the future, albeit that the condition was used in this case to protect landscape capacity.  There may be legal questions that the council has to answer, but we shall see.

As far as interactions with wild salmonids go, closing the old sites at Etives 1 and 5 and opening a new site at Etive 6 probably does not increase the risk to wild salmonids.  The main issue with Dawnfresh is their abysmal record of containing their fish.  Closing 2 old sites and opening a new site with new equipment should allow Dawnfresh to improve their containment issues.  The biomass in the loch will increase, but that shouldn’t be a problem to wild salmonids given that there will not be a sea lice infestation.

We shall see what happens in four months time, and I will keep you updated.

Best regards,

Craig.

Craig MacIntyre

Clerk

Argyll District Salmon Fishery Board