

Council

CNL(04)37

***Proposal for a Workshop to Assess Current and Developing Methods for
Marking Farmed Atlantic Salmon***

(tabled by the European Union)

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Despite the best efforts of the operators and managers of fish farms, it is inevitable that escapes will occur. Even where husbandry practices are as good as they can be, the possibility of equipment failure or catastrophic events remains. Currently, it is not always possible for fish which have escaped to be identified to the farm of origin. The escape of farmed salmon can have consequences not only for the wild salmon populations in the area to which the fish migrate, but also for the farmers, who lose stock, and may not always be aware of the extent of the loss, especially if there is an ongoing low-level escape process.

In the Strategic Framework for Scottish Aquaculture, published in 2003 by the Scottish Executive and developed by a Working Group comprising representatives of the Scottish fish farming industry, wild salmon interests and the Scottish Executive, a recommendation was made that an international assessment be undertaken of current and developing methods for the marking of farmed salmon. This approach to the problem was recommended because of the international nature of the industry, the need to ensure a “level playing field” across the industry throughout its range, and the magnitude of the problems associated with the logistics of marking the large numbers of fish involved.

A number of techniques are currently available for marking large numbers of juvenile Atlantic salmon, including some which combine marking techniques with fin-clipping and vaccination procedures. However, it is not clear that any systematic evaluation of the available techniques has been undertaken to allow fish farmers throughout the North Atlantic area to adopt a standardised method.

The European Union suggests that a Workshop be convened to address these issues. The Workshop should be held at an agreed date in late 2004 in Edinburgh, Scotland.

Draft Terms of Reference

1. To evaluate the current and developing techniques available for marking large numbers (many millions each year) of juvenile salmon destined for sea cage operations.
2. To develop protocols to ensure that smolts destined for different sea cage locations may be separately identified. (Each smolt-rearing station may supply smolts to a number of different fish farms, and each fish farm may receive smolts from a number of different smolt farms.)
3. To develop recommendations for screening techniques that may have to be used (often in remote fisheries) to identify marked fish farm escapees.
4. To examine the compatibility of marking techniques with food safety requirements, and their consistency with the requirement not to devalue the fish farm product.