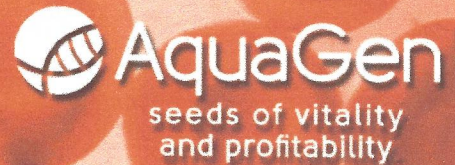


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## Minister vows to tackle fish farm licence delay

By [Jenny Hjul](#) - 19th September 2019 [f](#) [t](#) [G+](#) [in](#) [✉](#)



Fergus Ewing addressing trout farmers and industry representatives at the BTA conference yesterday

**SCOTLAND'S** Rural Economy Minister suggested yesterday that he would intervene to accelerate fish farmers' licence applications.

The current licensing system is a blockage to expansion that needs to be tackled head on, said Fergus Ewing, addressing the British Trout Association's annual conference, held over two days in Stirling.

The minister expressed his frustration over what he called a 'major problem', and promised to lever his authority to try to achieve a solution.

In answer to a question from Alastair Salvesen, owner of Dawnfresh, the UK's biggest trout farmer, Ewing said the issue had been raised often by salmon farmers.

Salvesen, whose company announced a £16 million plan earlier this year to double its production, complained at the slow pace of progress obtaining consents.

'We have been having quite a lot of problems getting new permissions... there are delays and delays and delays,' he said.

Even having got over all the hurdles and proved that a site is capable of accommodating a farm, Salvesen said they are then 'kicked back by your colleagues, turning round and saying the precautionary principle applies'.

Ewing acknowledged that trout and salmon farming were distinct sectors, and had specific challenges, but said the industry in general needed a 'team Scotland approach'

'If we are to see the expansion of the sector, we need to see consents being issued and being issued with reasonable speed,' he said.

'I think, for example, the CAR [Controlled Activities Regulations] licence requires Sepa [Scottish Environment Protection Agency] to respond within a number of weeks.

'You already have to satisfy pretty stringent rules in order to get consents, and that's right and proper.

'But I am concerned that things are taking too long and I don't think that's something we can be at all proud of, and something we can take head on.

'I believe we need to take a team Scotland approach...we have to listen very carefully to what businesses are saying, we have to meet with you and find out about individual cases, because every case is different.'

Leading aquaculture equipment supplier Stewart Graham, of Gael Force, and most of the salmon bosses have already raised these issues, said Ewing, but they are unresolved.

Graham, who co-chairs the Aquaculture Industry Leadership Group, has argued that there should be a one-stop shop, with a single body in charge of licences.

'There are also arguments that the Norwegian system of charging for licences may be something worth exploring,' said Ewing.

'And they have a discount on the fees for innovation sites which encourages innovation and R&D, it encourages the trying out of new techniques and trials.'

The minister said he would have a meeting with Dawnfresh to discuss the 'very serious issue' highlighted.

The company's proposals include four offshore sites across Argyll and Bute and North Ayrshire, that could increase production by 14,000 tonnes, and involve 36 permanent new jobs.

Ewing said: 'I think we have to get on and tackle this quickly, it's an issue that has been raised quite a lot.

'We have to get a resolution, not a blame game, but a resolution so we can go ahead with a faster, swifter system.'

It can be done, he added, but companies needed to bring their problems directly to him.

'If I don't hear about the problems, I don't have the ability to lever the solutions, put it that way, require people to find the solutions, rather than choose to kick the can down the road.'

The BTA conference was held at the Stirling Court Hotel at the University of Stirling, from September 18-19. A full report will appear in the October issue of Fish Farmer.

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