

Muintir Chill Damhnait
Derreens
Achill Sound
Westport
Co Mayo

Dear Chairperson,

I refer to the call for public submissions relating to the review of the Aquaculture licencing process.

My name is Michael Patten and I am the chairperson of Muintir Chill Damhnait based in Achill Island, Co. Mayo.

Muintir Chill Damhnait is a voluntary community group who are responsible for developing local projects in the Kildownet and Achill area. They organise the local festival – Feile Chill Damhnait , The Achill Sheep Show, and The Achill Sound St Patricks Day Parade. They produce an annual journal (Cill Damhnait *Imeachtaí na Bliana agus Súil Siar*). And have developed a hill loop walk (Slí Ghráinne Mhaol) and numerous other projects.

However, this process has been made a great deal easier in recent times due to the support of Marine Harvest Ireland (MHI). Employing 290 people along the western coast of Ireland and with its Clare Island Seafarms base located in Cloughmore on Achill, Marine Harvest Ireland supports numerous community, sporting and voluntary organisations and we are lucky enough to be one of those which has had funding allocated to it last year.

Marine Harvest through their local base Clare Island Seafarms provide much needed employment here in Achill. Clare Island Seafarms is of equal importance to Achill as Allergan is to Westport or Boston Scientific is to Galway or any other large pharmaceutical company is to other large towns. The only hope people along the western seaboard have in gaining employment is through aquaculture based companies such as Marine Harvest They offer the only possibility of keeping local people at home and keeping rural Ireland alive They help to keep the schools, shops, pubs, local garages and other small businesses open.

However, we are conscious that we can only source highly-valued sponsorship from businesses like Marine Harvest when they are in a position to build a sustainable business in our community. In addition to salmon, there is currently an unlocked potential for the development and growth of other aquaculture businesses in our county such as trout, shellfish and seaweed. However, there seems to be major difficulties in establishing and growing new enterprises in our coastal communities due to the very slow and un-transparent licencing system.

I don't profess to having any scientific expertise in the area of aquaculture but I am aware of the ongoing review and of massive difficulties in the current licencing regime. I would pose the question as to why it takes so long to get a licence in Ireland when compared to our near neighbours in Scotland and Norway which have thriving aquaculture industries.

If it is a case of not having enough personnel in place to rule on licence applications, surely resources could be redeployed within the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine (DAFM) given the dwindling numbers in Irish agriculture. It makes no sense whatsoever that we are restricting a golden opportunity for economic growth because we cannot process applications quickly enough. It's time for some expansive thinking to resolve this issue for once and for all.

It is time to act now so I appeal to you to do something to help develop and grow Irish aquaculture.

Sincerely,

Michael Patten (Chairman)