

Salmon Watch Ireland makes complaint to the EU Commission about Irish salmon farms. *Friday 20th February 2009*

Salmon Watch Ireland has lodged a formal complaint with the European Commission about the Irish management regime for salmon farms. The complaint contends that the farms are responsible for the generation of high levels of sea lice infestation in juvenile salmon (generally called smolts) migrating from rivers to their feeding grounds in the sea. Research in Ireland, Norway and Scotland has established that the mortality of smolts is significantly affected by sea lice infestation.

“Salmon Watch Ireland is not opposed to properly operated salmon farms” said Niall Greene, chair of the board of Salmon Watch Ireland said, “but the evidence over many years is that sea lice levels associated with salmon farms are consistently well above those provided for in the protocols under which the farms are licensed by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Although techniques for controlling sea lice are well known there is no effort by the Irish authorities to enforce them. The result is the creation of further severe, but avoidable, strains on the survival chances of juvenile salmon.”

The complaint to the European Commission has been based largely on Article 6 of the Habitats Directive which is the same provision that was used to bring an end to mixed stock (drift net) fishing for salmon in Irish waters in 2007. The complaint contends that the Irish authorities are failing to take a precautionary approach to the management of wild salmon smolts as they move from Special Areas of Conservation to the sea.

“We have the European Commission to require the Irish authorities to adopt a precautionary approach to the siting of salmon farms. This would mean that no farm would be sited closer than 20 kilometres from the mouth of a salmon bearing river” Mr Greene said.