

Context to the questions asked

It is important to consider the answers to all the questions detailed above with some further context. Specifically, in relation to the measures in place which offer protection through the trade in live aquatic animals and their products and the aquatic animal health surveillance programme conducted within Scotland. In that regard, please refer to Annex 1 of this reply.

In addition, I note that many of your questions are focused upon the testing of ova. In general, screening of ova for aquatic animal pathogens is not a widely conducted practice. **The international standards for testing, as specified through the OIE Manual of Diagnostic Tests for Aquatic Animals and Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2015/1554 recommend the screening of fish, rather than ova as the standard methods for pathogen detection.** Whilst the screening of ova can be undertaken, it is less preferential to testing fish tissues as there are relatively few aquatic animal pathogens which exhibit true vertical transmission. Technical complexities make this testing method difficult for many of the modern molecular techniques currently employed.

Within your questions you specifically refer to ISA (Infectious salmon anaemia – caused by ISAV) and PRV (Piscine orthoreovirus). These two pathogens are handled differently under the current legislation implemented within Scotland.

Infectious salmon anaemia (ISA) (infection with genotype HPR-deleted of the genus Isavirus (ISAV)) is listed under Council Directive 2006/88/EC and controlled within Scotland through the Aquatic Animal Health (Scotland) Regulations 2009. Scotland, as part of the Great Britain health zone, has recognised freedom for ISAV (HPR-deleted). **As a result, trade in live ova and fish can only occur from areas of equivalent recognised disease freedom and consignments must be accompanied by a valid health certificate, with appropriate health attestations signed by the competent authority within the exporting country.**

PRV differs from ISAV HPR-deleted. It is not a pathogen which is listed under the current regulations and therefore is not controlled within Scotland through the Aquatic Animal Health (Scotland) Regulations 2009.

Aquatic animal health surveillance conducted within Scotland is undertaken to fulfil the legal requirements of Council Directive 2006/88/EC. This comprises both active (risk-based) and passive (intelligence driven) surveillance initiatives designed to detect and control listed and emerging diseases. The inspection and sampling programmes are subject to regular external audits to ensure compliance with technical and legal standards.

Our practice and approach is guided by current international and legislative standards concerning the detection of aquatic animal pathogens which as we have set out above, does not currently require the testing of ova. Further detail is provided within Annex 1 of this response.

Further information requested

In addition to the questions you asked detailed above, you also requested the following:

- information since 1 January 2019 in relation to the testing of farmed salmon for diseases, pathogens and viruses (expanding upon the scope of a previous request Fol/19/00882 seeking information on Piscine Reovirus (PRV) and Heart & Skeletal Muscle Inflammation (HSMI)).
- information relating to Marine Scotland Science's commercial testing service conducted on behalf of third parties. You have requested information since 1 January 2019 in relation to ISA, CMS, AGD, *Pasteurellaskyensis*, Salmon Gill Poxvirus, Complex Gill Disease, Pancreas Disease and other diseases, pathogens and viruses (and PRV/HSMI since 24 March 2019). Sampling and testing for various pathogens is undertaken as part of Scotland's Aquatic Animal Health surveillance programme, in line with the current regulations concerning aquatic animal health in Scotland. The results and outcomes of this surveillance are made publicly available through an active publication plan:-

<https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/marine/Fish-Shellfish/FHI/CaseInformation>.

Published information details the aquaculture sites and businesses at which testing was performed, the number of animals tested, the test methods conducted and the result of those tests.

You can find further information about the commercial testing service offered by Marine Scotland Science on our website:

<https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/marine/Fish-Shellfish/aquaculture/Diagnostics>

Commercial testing results relate to samples submitted from various third parties. In the majority of cases, from the records held by Marine Scotland Science, the owner or client to whom those samples relate cannot be identified. Therefore, samples and their results cannot be linked to any particular source. The sources of commercial samples not only relate to aquaculture sites both within and out with Scotland but may also include samples from transmission trials concerning experimental animals and facilities. Consequently, there are severe limitations in the interpretation of this data.

As previously explained in our response to request Fol/19/01397, a request submitted concerning information on commercial testing by salmon farming, we are unable to provide the information requested in this case. While our aim is to provide information whenever possible, in this instance an exception under regulation 10(5)(e) (substantial prejudice to confidentiality of commercial or industrial information) of the EIRs applies to the information in this case. The reasons why that exception applies are explained within Annex 2 of this letter.

An exception under regulation 10(4)(e) of the EIRs (internal communications) also applies to a small amount of the information you have requested because it is internal communication between Scottish Government officials about diagnostic testing of samples from farmed fish.

This exception is subject to the 'public interest test'. Therefore, taking account of all the circumstances of this case, we have considered if the public interest in disclosing the information outweighs the public interest in applying the exception. We have found that, on balance, the public interest lies in favour of upholding the exception. We recognise that there is some public interest in release as part of open, transparent and accountable government, and to inform public debate. However, there is a greater public interest in allowing officials to discuss preliminary testing and novel diagnostic methods in a professional setting. The final results of the tests discussed in the correspondence being withheld have been published, and the discussion adds nothing to the public understanding of the presence of diseases or pathogens on Scottish salmon farms.