

## An Open Letter to Candidates for the 2026 Scottish Parliament Election



Dear Candidate,

Salmon Scotland represents Scotland's salmon producers and the extensive supply chain which they support. We are writing collectively to introduce Salmon Scotland and to underline the importance of our sector to Scotland's rural, coastal and national economy. We also wish to express our shared ambition to work constructively and collaboratively with the next Scottish Government, regardless of political affiliation, for the long-term benefit of communities across Scotland.

We recognise that many candidates may be new to the sector. Scottish salmon farming is not only Scotland's largest food export, but also a powerhouse of rural and coastal employment, innovation and community resilience. Our sector is rooted in areas where alternative employment opportunities are often limited, and we take seriously our responsibility to operate sustainably and responsibly over the longer term.

### **Why the Scottish salmon sector matters**

Scottish salmon is a global success story, contributing almost £1 billion in Gross Value Added (GVA) to the Scottish economy each year and supporting around 11,000 jobs across Scotland, directly and through the supply chain, with an economic footprint in every Scottish Parliament constituency.

The impact is especially significant in the Highlands and Islands, where the sector contributes £307 million to the economy and supports 3,530 jobs. These are high-quality, well-paid careers, with average salaries of approximately £44,500, more than 16 per cent above the Scottish median wage. Such employment plays a vital role in supporting food security, sustaining population levels, countering rural depopulation, and ensuring our coastal communities remain thriving places to live and work.

## **A cornerstone of Scotland's food system and food security**

Scottish salmon is a core pillar of Scotland's food system and a globally recognised, affordable and nutritious source of protein. It is widely recognised as one of the most resource-efficient animal proteins to produce, with a low carbon footprint and high nutritional value, making it a critical contributor to sustainable food production.

In a world facing increasing geopolitical instability, climate pressures and supply-chain disruption, domestic food production has never been more important. Scottish salmon plays a key role in strengthening national food security, reducing reliance on imports and ensuring Scotland continues to produce high-quality food to trusted standards.

The international reputation of Scottish salmon is unmatched. Protected by PGI (Protected Geographical Indication) status and underpinned by robust regulation and continual improvement, Scottish salmon is recognised in premium markets across the world as a symbol of quality, provenance and trust. This reputation enhances Scotland's standing as a global food-producing nation and supports wider Brand Scotland ambitions.

Beyond employment and income, the salmon sector underpins a wider ecosystem of local suppliers including feed, transport, vessel operators, engineering, technology, veterinary services and professional services, reinforcing economic resilience across rural and coastal Scotland.

## **A sector committed to innovation and continuous improvement**

Our ambition is demonstrated through sustained investment. Since 2018 alone, the sector has invested about £1bn in innovation overall, of which nearly £200 million is dedicated R&D and innovation, with a strong focus on fish health and welfare, environmental improvements, new technologies, and strengthening productivity. This reflects a shared commitment to producing world-class food while continually raising our standards.

We recognise that the sector faces challenges and scrutiny, and we are approaching these with openness and determination for continual improvement. Our progress will rely on collaboration with government agencies, including regulators, research bodies and SAIC (Scottish Aquaculture Innovation Cluster), local authorities, enterprise agencies and NGOs. Working together, we want to build on what has been achieved and continue the journey of improvement in a way that continues to benefit communities and the environment alike.

## **Looking ahead: growth, exports and opportunity**

With new free trade agreements with major global growth markets will come into force from 2026, Scottish salmon is well-placed to further strengthen its position as the UK's top food export. Realising this opportunity, however, will depend on a policy environment that supports growth, competitiveness and long-term investment.

At present, Scotland's salmon sector faces a complex, protracted and fragmented consenting and regulatory landscape, which places producers and supply-chain businesses at a disadvantage compared with international competitors. Reducing unnecessary bureaucracy and delays will unlock private investment, protect existing jobs, create new employment opportunities, and help anchor strong populations and resilient economies in Scotland's rural and coastal communities.

## An invitation to engage and work together

As candidates for the 2026 Scottish Parliament election, we would welcome your engagement with a sector that delivers skilled employment, export success, innovation, and long-term investment, and which remains a cornerstone of Scotland's food system.

We would warmly welcome the opportunity to meet with you, discuss the priorities for your communities, and invite you to visit farms, processing sites and supply-chain businesses to see first-hand the work being done and meet the people involved. Understanding local impacts and metrics is key to shaping good policy, and we want to work with you to ensure the sector continues to deliver shared benefits.

With the right policy framework and joined-up support from all arms of government, local people can continue to produce world-class food while safeguarding the communities and environment on which we all depend.

We look forward to engaging with you during the election period and beyond.

Yours sincerely,

Salmon Scotland

