

AECOM

Salmon
SCOTLAND



The role of the Scottish salmon farming sector in Scotland's rural and coastal communities

July 2026



DELIVERING
A BETTER
WORLD.

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of AECOM's independent review of the role of salmon farming in Scotland's communities. Drawing on data provided by Salmon Scotland members, as well as interviews with community members, the study provides place-based insight into how impacts are experienced locally.

The review finds that salmon farming significantly supports the economic and social fabric of Scotland's rural, coastal and island communities. The benefits are most strongly felt where employment and investment are locally visible and embedded into the day-to-day lives of local people.

An anchor of rural and island economies

Salmon farming acts as a key anchor industry in many remote and island communities, particularly where alternative sources of year-round employment are limited. National evidence shows the sector supports around 2,460 direct jobs and £231 million in direct Gross Value Added (GVA), with even greater impacts when supply chain and employee spending effects are included (approximately 10,850 jobs and £953 million GVA across Scotland; BiGGAR Economics, 2025).

These impacts are concentrated in rural and island communities, where job numbers are often small but can have significant economic multiplier effects. For example, on the island of Muck, salmon farming directly employs approximately 34% of the population, helping to sustain year-round local services and economic activity.

91.3-99.8% of roles reported as permanent

6.5 - 9.5 years average tenure, indicating long term local employment

350+ employees recruited locally in 2025 by salmon farmers

Population retention, skills and workforce sustainability

By providing stable employment, competitive wages and clear training pathways, salmon farming plays an important role in retaining and attracting working-age people in rural and island communities, helping to counter depopulation and ageing demographic trends.

Interviewees in communities such as Uist and Westray highlighted the importance of salmon farming in sustaining schools, attracting younger families and supporting long term viability. While salmon farming company ownership structures are often international, employment and investment are local, and community members emphasised the importance of continued local investment and employment for protecting community resilience going forward.

139 apprenticeships

delivered by salmon farmers in 2025

10,000+ students reached annually through careers, STEM and engagement

80%+ retention for apprentices

Community investment and social contribution

Community benefits extend well beyond employment. All surveyed salmon farming companies operate Community Benefit Funds. Collectively, these funds distributed between approximately £383,000 and £784,000 per year across Scotland between 2020 and 2025, supporting community halls, sports clubs, schools, cultural events and essential infrastructure

Salmon farmer investment in essential services such as broadband connectivity has had a transformative impact on rural communities such as Drimnin, where funding in broadband has improved community resilience, enabled local people to work from home and allowed local businesses to continue to operate. Community confidence in the sector is strongest where there is visible presence, long-standing local management and local employment, evidenced in rural areas such as Orkney.

100% of responding salmon farmers (4/4) operate Community Benefit Funds

£500,000 average annual Community Benefit Fund spend⁽²⁰²⁰⁻²⁰²⁵⁾

Environmental stewardship and trust

Engagement with communities and salmon farmers highlighted visible local environmental action, including investment in monitoring, containment, low carbon technology and circular economy initiatives.

Salmon farmers publish a wide range of granular data and information on fish health, environmental performance, and regulatory compliance, on publicly available online sources. In some cases, community members were not aware of this, and therefore, additional promotion and communication from the industry on how local people can access environmental information would be beneficial.

£23 million+ invested by responding salmon farmers in 2025 in environmental risk reduction and resilience measures

100+ beach cleans supported annually covering **80+ miles of coastline**

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Context

This report summarises the key findings from AECOM's 2026 independent review on behalf of Salmon Scotland on the role of salmon farming in rural and coastal communities across Scotland.

The recent economic impact report of Scottish salmon farming produced by BiGGAR Economics for Salmon Scotland¹ demonstrates the sector's significant contribution to Scotland's economy. This study builds on this work and adds analysis and insight on the wider social and community benefits of the sector, presenting robust social impact metrics, gathering qualitative insights, and recommendations for future sector-community engagement. This review is set against an evolving policy backdrop.

The Scottish Government's Vision for Sustainable Aquaculture sets the overarching direction for the sector, emphasising that future growth must be environmentally sound, economically viable, and socially acceptable, particularly in rural, coastal and island communities where salmon farming is concentrated. The Vision explicitly recognises the industry's role in sustaining remote communities, while acknowledging concerns around cumulative impacts and community confidence.

Salmon farming is guided by a combination of plans, the policies of which are examined by local authorities to help scrutinise developments. Scotland's National Marine Plan² requires decision-makers to consider social and economic impacts in marine developments. This is reinforced by National Planning Framework and Scottish Planning Policy, which highlight the importance of supporting resilient rural economies while protecting local amenity and community interests. The Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 provides the regulatory framework for public authorities to consider the needs of island communities. The Second National Islands Plan (2026) outlines actions to help implement and deliver policies, services and investment into island communities. Its overarching objective is population retention and attraction, with an emphasis on sustainable employment, community wellbeing and local empowerment. The Plan recognises the critical role that salmon farming plays in island and coastal economies, but stresses that economic contribution alone is insufficient if communities do not experience tangible social benefits. It places increased importance on community confidence, fairness, and place-based impacts.



Approach

The study assessed social and community impacts across three key pillars, guided by the UK Government's Magenta Book for guidance on evaluation studies³.

1. Local economic multiplier effects. These are impacts and effects beyond the first level of economic impact, considering factors such as down-chain suppliers, and spend in local businesses and services.

2. Direct and in-kind community benefits. Direct impacts such as funds, and in-kind impacts such as donating funds to community projects.

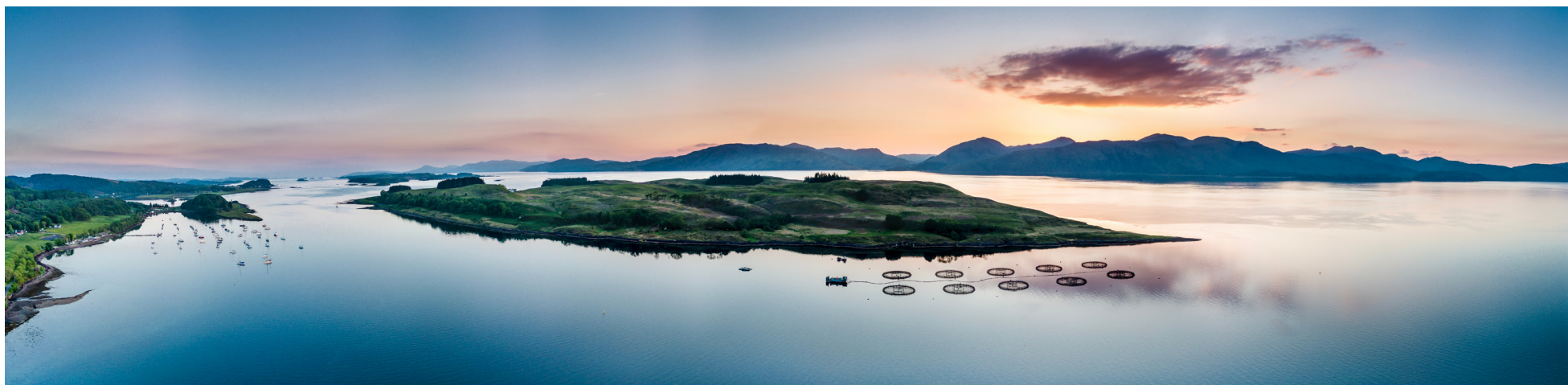
3. Community wealth creation aligned with five pillars of Community Wealth Building. Community Wealth Building is increasingly challenging conventional approaches to regeneration and economic development. CWB "changes the way that our economies function, retaining more wealth and opportunity for the benefit of local people".⁴

These pillars informed our four key research themes, that helped to systematically identify inputs, outputs & activities and outcomes & impacts throughout the research tasks. Our four key research themes and how they align to the social evaluation theories are outlined in Figure 1 (presented on the following page).

Study limitations

The report is based on a combination of salmon farmer provided data, survey responses and interviews. Quantitative figures were supplied by salmon farmers and suppliers directly to AECOM or through previous analysis by BiGGAR Economics and are not publicly available.

Qualitative findings reflect the experience and perspectives of a sample of salmon farmers, suppliers and community representatives.



		 Economic	 Social	 Cultural	 Environmental
Local Economic Multiplier Effects	Direct employment, GVA and capital investments: Proximity and type of jobs, GVA, and impact of capital investment	●			
	Indirect, supply chain effects: Volume, value and proximity of local tier 1 suppliers and proximity of their workforce and supply chains	●	●		
	Induced, employee expenditure effects: Wages and subsequent spending flowing to local businesses and services within rural and coastal communities	●	●		
	Comparative economic value: Benchmarking and contextualising scale of impact in the context of rural and coastal communities	●	●		
Direct and in-kind community benefits	Infrastructure / facilities: Donating materials, upgrading public spaces, or improving community centres/resources	●	●	●	
	Skills and education: Delivering training and apprenticeships, engaging schools and colleges to inspire young people and support local skills development	●	●		
	Services and resources: Offering access to technology, broadband, or professional services		●	●	
	Environmental initiatives: Supporting habitat restoration, biodiversity projects, or enhancing eco-tourism				●
Community Wealth Building	Inclusive ownership: Local and social enterprises to generate community wealth, including social enterprises / employee-owned firms	●	●	●	
	Spending: Maximising community benefits through procurement and commissioning, including fair work and shorter supply chains	●	●		
	Finance: Flows of investment and financial institutions that work for local communities and business	●			
	Workforce: Increasing fair work and developing local labour markets that support wellbeing of communities	●	●		
	Land and property: Growing social, ecological, financial and economic value local communities gain from land/property assets	●	●	●	●

Figure 1
Research pillars for this study and how they relate to the four key research themes presented in this report

Case study interviews

A total of 5 communities were selected as case studies. Communities were chosen based on their rural or coastal location (aiming to achieve a good geographical spread) and degree of integration with salmon farming activity. Stakeholders were invited for interview due to their direct involvement in salmon farming operations or their representative role within the local community, to provide local knowledge and opinions as well as information relating to salmon farming activities. A total of 16 interviews were conducted remotely, with salmon farmers and local community representatives.



Surveys

An online survey was circulated to Salmon Scotland members, one for salmon farmers and their c.200 farms, and another for c.50 supply chain organisations, each tailored to the audience. Surveys included questions on quantitative metrics such as the number and type of jobs and investments provided, and qualitative information, for example, on volunteering initiatives. AECOM received survey responses from 4 out of the 5 salmon farmer members (an 80% response rate): Mowi, Bakkafrøst Scotland, Scottish Sea Farms (SSF), Cooke Scotland⁵. This represents approximately 97% of the sectors production capacity (2025).

MOWI[®]

Scottish Sea Farms

BAKKAFRØST
ESTABLISHED 1968
The Finest Salmon from SCOTLAND

Cooke
SCOTLAND

Out of 50 supply chain members, 11 responded (a 22% response rate). Findings are based on 10 responses, excluding one response that did not contain usable data, reducing the effective supplier response rate to 20%. Many survey questions were optional, with respondents able to leave questions blank or select "unsure / prefer not to say", meaning response rates vary by question. All findings are based on the information provided, with respondent numbers indicated for context throughout the analysis. The survey analysis was triangulated with other key sources of information including the BiGGAR Economics 2025 report, salmon farmer end of year reports and publicly available information on the sector.

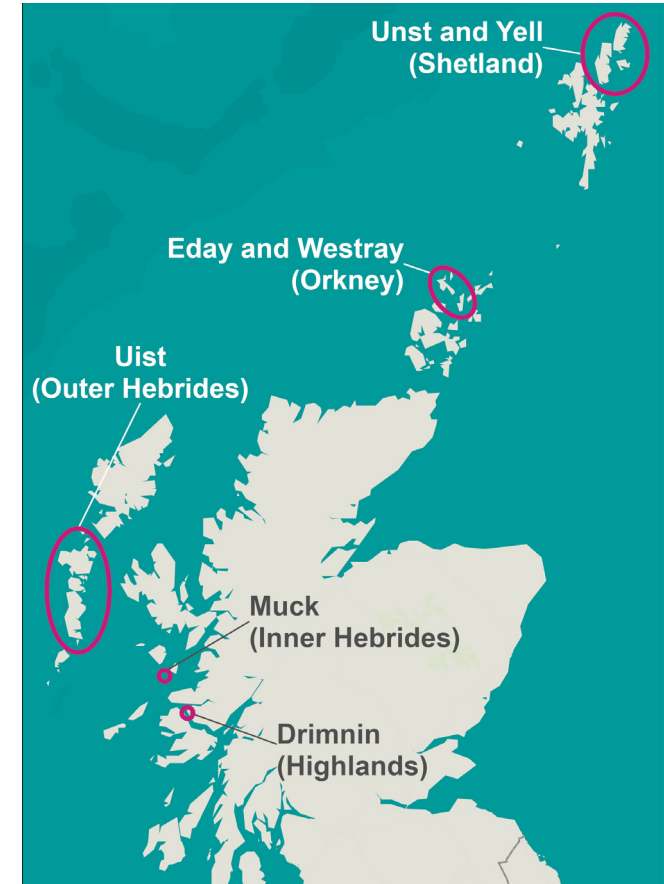


Figure 2
Community case study locations





Economic Impacts

The results from engagement with salmon farmers, supply chain members, and community representatives provide additional regional, local and community context to previously published national economic figures, for example, within the 2025 report by BiGGAR Economics on the Economic Impact of Scottish Salmon Farming⁶. The headline results of the BiGGAR report, based on 2024 figures, are shown in the table below.

	GVA (£m)	Employment
Direct impact	231.2	2,460
Supply chain impact	589.9	7,040
Investment impact	66.5	860
Staff spending impact	65.5	490
Total impact (Scotland)	953.2	10,850

BiGGAR Economics, 2025



We wouldn't be operating the shop at the level we're at now, employing 5 full time equivalent staff, if it wasn't for the salmon farm.

Shop owner, Westray

Salmon farmer impacts

Scottish salmon farmers are major economic drivers. In 2024, the industry:



Supported **2,460** direct jobs



Generated **£231 million** in direct GVA across Scotland

Local workforce geography

Employees largely live within the same communities where farms are located, across Argyll and Bute, Na h-Eileanan Siar, Highland, North Ayrshire, Orkney and Shetland. Workers are based in both regional centres and very small, remote settlements, indicating that salmon farming supports local living and working in fragile communities with limited alternative year-round employment, consistent with BiGGAR Economics' findings.

Study Area	Direct Employment (2024)
Argyll and Bute	520
Na h-Eileanan Siar	260
Highland	840
Orkney	220
Shetland	390

BiGGAR Economics, 2025





Anchor role in rural and coastal communities

In rural and island economies, relatively small numbers of people employed can have significant effects on population retention and service viability, reinforcing salmon farming's role as an anchor economic activity. Salmon farmers identified Yell (~966 residents), Unst (~639 residents), Westray (~600 residents), Stronsay (~320–350 residents), Hoy (~390–420 residents) and Muck (~35 residents) as examples of communities where salmon farming provides well-paid, year-round jobs, sustained local spending and ongoing investment in facilities and infrastructure.



Over 350 employees recruited in 2025 lived within the local authority area or within a 45-minute commute

Communities emphasised the importance of clear communication and collaboration on long term plans and investment from the sector, with a focus on retaining talent through job creation and local recruitment as well as career development.

Employment in case study communities

Salmon farming is the largest local employer in Unst & Yell, employing over 120 people. There are 56 staff employed by Mowi in Uist and 20 by Bakkafrøst Scotland (70 across Uist and Barra combined). In Muck, 2 current employees live on Muck and others travel from local areas on a 2-week shift pattern, providing flexibility for staff.



These islands have relatively small and dispersed populations with limited alternative private-sector employment opportunities. As well as providing well-paid salaries and year-round employment; Cooke [Scotland] put money into the economy by investing in its farms and other facilities and spending with local suppliers. As a result, Cooke Scotland has maintained local populations, sustained the uptake of local schools, ferries, shops and cafes, and created ongoing operational spending with local businesses.

Salmon farmer survey response

Salmon farmers proactively tackling barriers to recruitment

The table highlights the scale of local workforce integration and the barriers to recruiting more people in rural and island communities. To help tackle some of these issues, as well as factors such as housing availability and specialist skills shortages that can limit local labour supply, salmon farmers reported investing in relocation allowances (up to £8,000) for home purchase or sale costs, legal and travel expenses, temporary accommodation rent support schemes, assistance with moving personal items, and funded visits for family members. One salmon farmer reported that whilst investments are modest in absolute terms, in small communities even a small number of working-age households could influence demographic balance, school enrolment and labour availability.

Salmon farmers reported the creation of at least **41 new jobs in 2025** that were filled by people that have lived locally for more than six months, and over 350 employees were recruited in 2025 within the local authority area or within a 45-minute commute.

Housing availability was identified as the most significant constraint on local recruitment, followed by transport and connectivity challenges, particularly in island and remote mainland locations.

“

Without Scottish Sea Farms, the 50-60 households who rely on internet would not be getting this service.

Local community member, Drimnin

Theme	Evidence from salmon farmer responses
Population attraction	One producer reported employees relocating into rural and island areas in 2025, including 3 to Argyll and Bute, 2 to Na h-Eileanan Siar, and 6 to Highland. While inward migration associated with individual producers is modest in absolute terms, in communities with low baseline housing turnover and aging populations, even a small number of working-age households can influence demographic balance, school enrolment and labour availability.
Local job creation	Two salmon farmers reported the creation of at least 41 new jobs in 2025 that were filled by workers resident locally for more than six months.
Local recruitment	Two salmon farmers reported recruitment geography, together indicating that over 350 employees recruited in 2025 lived within the local authority area or within a 45-minute commute of their workplace, demonstrating a strong local labour footprint.
Barriers to local recruitment	Housing availability was identified as the most significant constraint on local recruitment by three salmon farmers, followed by transport and connectivity challenges, particularly in island and remote mainland locations.





Fishers shifting to salmon farming, seasonally or permanently, bring vital skills, vessels, and work patterns needed for modern operations, especially in exposed locations. Three salmon farmers reported employing fishing-related staff in 2025, with a combined total of 307 fishers. Employment was concentrated in Shetland (143 fishers), Orkney (74), Argyll and Bute (50) and Highland (40). In addition, one salmon farmer reported 20 voluntary or short-term fishing-related contracts in 2025, delivered through locally based, ad-hoc contracts to meet periods of high demand, providing flexible income opportunities for local people, creating pathways to high skilled labour.

Capital investment

Alongside employment impacts, salmon farmers reported substantial capital investment in infrastructure across rural and island locations, including production facilities, vessels, accommodation, power and environmental assets. The BiGGAR study reported:

£107 million in capital investments made by salmon farmers in 2024, generating **£67 million GVA** for the Scottish economy, supporting **860+ jobs**

In communities with small populations, capital investments of this scale represent a significant share of local private sector investment. These investments demonstrate sustained capital commitment to rural and island economies.

“

While salmon farming has been present for decades, its evolution has led to more skilled and higher paid roles, supported by advanced technologies.

Bakkafrost Scotland

Capital Investment Snapshot

- £23m Cairndow RAS (Argyll and Bute): New recirculating aquaculture system supporting long-term, high-skill employment, improved bio-security and sustainable production, with construction underway and operation expected from 2027.
- £22m+ farm expansions (Westray & Stronsay, Orkney): Investment in pens, moorings, vessels and barges (including hybrid assets), supporting local supply chains, schools, ferries and population retention on small islands.
- £30m+ invested across 2024–25 in Highland, Na h-Eileanan Siar and Orkney: Infrastructure, machinery, waste processing, accommodation, power connections and processing upgrades.
- Targeted low-carbon investment (Shetland): Hybrid barge reducing fuel use, emissions and noise, delivering direct environmental and community benefits.

Supply chain impacts

Scottish salmon farming has a nationally significant supply chain footprint:

£ Over **£700 million** spent annually with Scottish businesses

Supports around **7,000 jobs**

Generates nearly **£600 million** in GVA, mostly in rural and island areas

Previous work commissioned by Salmon Scotland found that almost all Inverlussa, Migdale and Gael Force staff are based in the Highlands and Islands, with 65% of Scottish spend retained locally, while 2024 supplier mapping for Mowi and Cooke Scotland shows activity is widely distributed across Inverness, Oban, Lochaber, the Western Isles and the Cromarty Firth.

One salmon farmer estimated that 51–75% of their total supply chain spend was with micro and small-to-medium enterprises (SMEs). Based on supplier postcode analysis, more than a 3rd of UK salmon farming suppliers are located in rural areas.

Two salmon farmers reported including social value requirements in tenders. One quantified this, stating that 100% of tenders included social value criteria, weighted at 10% in evaluation scoring. Other respondents were unsure, preferred not to quantify, or reported no inclusion, indicating that formal reporting of social value in procurement is uneven across the sector.

Local workforce in the supply chain

70% of suppliers reported that their workforce is primarily local

40% of suppliers reported that employees had moved into rural or island areas as a result of taking up roles



Figure 4
MOWI and Cooke spend locations in the study area (2024).

Where figures were provided for inward migration, the scale was generally small, involving fewer than five employees per organisation, however, even small numbers can have a significant positive impact on small communities.

Local job creation and recruitment

60% of suppliers reported creating new salmon-farming roles in 2025 that were filled by local workers

Reported figures ranged from 1-20 jobs, depending on organisational scale

70% of suppliers reported recruiting employees who live within the relevant local authority area or within a 45-minute commute of their workplace

“

Salmon farming plays a significant role in local life and is one of the largest contributors to the economy in Unst, Yell, and Shetland more broadly.

Local Councillor – Unst & Yell

Salaries, job quality and induced impacts

The industry is committed to providing well-paid, year-round employment in rural and island communities.

 The average industry salary in 2024 was **£44,539**, around **16%** above the Scottish median

The average salary responses for suppliers ranged from £26k to £70k, with a median of £46k across responding suppliers, indicating a broad range of earnings, broadly similar to the average salaries stated in previous work commissioned by Salmon Scotland.

 Industry employee spending supported **£65.5 million** in GVA and **490 jobs**, largely locally

 **91.3-99.8%** of industry roles are permanent, providing long-term security to staff

 **>90%** of the industry offer pensions above the statutory minimum

 **>90%** of the industry pay all staff at least the UK Real Living Wage*

Indirect impacts in case study locations

Local employees, their families, and visiting contractors, support local shops, leisure facilities, transport services and accommodation, contributing to the economy and helping tackle outward migration and ageing population issues.

- At least 20 of the children at the school in Westray are children of those who work on the salmon farms, meaning the school can provide a better education with more staff than if the salmon farm were not there. Teaching posts have also been added in Orkney, due to increased demand.
- In Unst & Yell, the farm supports employment for 2 local haulage drivers.
- In Uist, the industry supports several salmon smokehouses.
- Staff accommodation creates additional local jobs (e.g. cleaners) in Orkney.

Some community members highlighted the reliance on a small number of multinational operators could increase vulnerability, and higher wages in the sector can draw labour away from other traditional, smaller scale sectors, however, there is clear evidence that salmon farming drives economic growth and provides long term economic security in small communities.

Role	Approximate average salary range (£ p.a.)	Contribution to local economy
Farm staff	£26,000–£39,000	Year-round income supporting local shops, services and housing
Farm managers	£45,000–£65,000	Higher-value salaries contributing to skilled employment retention
Environment & fish health	£35,000–£50,000	Specialist roles supporting science-based rural employment
Processing & logistics	£26,000–£45,000	Stable operational jobs sustaining local service demand
Technical & engineering	£41,000–£55,000	Skilled technical roles strengthening local supply chains
Support & administration	£45,000–£48,000	Professional roles often based in rural towns and hubs

AECOM salmon farmer survey analysis, 2026

*UK Real Living Wage for 2025/26 is stated as £13.45 per hour, as set by the Living Wage Foundation.





Social Impacts

The key social impacts reported by salmon farmers, suppliers and community representatives are summarised below.

Workforce

 **100%** of salmon farmers operate formal employee engagement structures, with **51–71%** staff participation

 Long-term average tenure (**6.5–9.5 years** for salmon farmers; **4.5–12 years** for suppliers), and a low staff turnover of **14–26%**

 Suppliers report typically **0–5** overtime hours per week and **28–35 days** annual leave

“

All Marine, Freshwater and Broodstock employees follow [our] Competency Framework apprentice to expert programme with annual reviews linked to grade and salary. Training opportunities applicable to the role.

Salmon farmer survey response

Progression and inclusion

Three salmon farmers reported up to 10%, and one reported 16%, of staff progressing into higher-level roles in 2025. Two salmon farmers reported actively recruiting under-represented groups. Supplier responses also demonstrate accessible entry routes, including recruitment of those with low or no formal qualifications, providing on-the-job training, supporting social mobility and skills development in rural labour markets.

 **60%** of suppliers reported recruiting young people via school-leaver and apprenticeship pathways

Support for families and carers

One salmon farmer provided £8,000 of childcare support in 2025, benefiting 25 employees and up to 25 children. Three salmon farmers provide in-kind carer support, including flexible working and paid leave for emergency service duties.



Skills, training and career pathways

Interviews with salmon farmers, community members and councillors raised the significant positive impact of the training offered by salmon farmers, for example, on health and safety, vessel chartering, and fish health and welfare. Training opportunities offer clear career pathways, transferable skills and recognised qualifications, providing employees with long term career prospects.

Apprenticeships and recruitment



139 apprenticeships were delivered by the four responding salmon farmers in 2025



>80% of apprentices who started before 2025 were still employed in 2025

Three salmon farmers recruited 11 school leavers in 2025. Graduate recruitment focused on marine science, biology, environmental and veterinary sciences, and finance/ business, with university engagement leading to paid placements and direct job offers.

One salmon farmer reported a 100% retention rate for apprentices. This indicates that apprenticeships are going on to receive sustained, long term employment.

Training



100% of salmon farmers provided structured training in 2025, including professional certification, health and safety, and management

School and education engagement



88 education and school-engagement events delivered by salmon farmers in 2025, reaching over 10,000 students

This included school visits, careers talks, STEM workshops, site tours and university events.



At least 12 work-experience placements were provided by salmon farmers

Work experience placements typically last 3–5 days, and focus on aquaculture operations, marine roles, processing, logistics and environmental functions. Salmon farmers also reported active engagement with the University of Stirling (Institute of Aquaculture), SAMS UHI, and UHI Shetland.



Shetland school pupils have gained hands-on experience and enhanced their maritime skills on a unique sailing vessel through the continued support of the Cooke Community Benefit Fund. Since 2021 the ongoing partnership[...] has benefited around 200 school pupils.

Salmon farmer survey response

Skills and training in case study communities

- In Unst & Yell, 4-5 local apprentices have recently been hired, with plans to create additional apprenticeship roles in 2026.
- In Muck and Orkney, salmon farmers provide employees with training such as first aid, vessel chartering, and forklift/ telehandler operating, and apprenticeships (for example, modern aquaculture via UHI Shetland).
- Both Mowi and Bakkafrøst Scotland in Uist engage with the local high school annually through careers fairs. This has led to the recent recruitment of 3 school-leaver apprentices at Mowi's site. Bakkafrøst Scotland's presence from broodstock to harvest in Uist provides training across the operational lifecycle.

Transport and infrastructure

Transport and infrastructure activities support connectivity, local livelihoods and services, and enhance community resilience, particularly in areas subject to geographic isolation, limited infrastructure and severe weather conditions.

Transport support

All salmon farmers provided transport-related support to local communities in 2025, particularly in highland and island areas during periods of severe weather. Support included road and ferry infrastructure, emergency and community transport, logistics assistance and use of company vehicles.



A least £1.22 million invested in major transport infrastructure

This includes approximately £15,000 invested in local active travel initiatives, and funding to support feasibility and impact assessment work for the Unst and Yell Tunnels project.



~3,650 people used or benefited from transport initiatives or projects supported by salmon farmers in 2025

Other smaller scale support includes examples such as Mowi helping to fund community buses in Glenelg and patient transport to hospital appointments in Ardnamurchan. Some community representatives were not aware of investment in local transport infrastructure by the local salmon farmers, suggesting this funding could be more widely publicised.

Shared benefits

Salmon farms often provide and maintain services that are used by the wider community including piers, pontoons and transport vessels. For example, in Muck, Mowi supports the installation and maintenance of community moorings, where all proceeds go to the local primary school fund. Defibrillators are installed across sites, providing this vital emergency resource for all community members.

Salmon farming workforces frequently act as informal first responders in remote and island communities during severe weather events, providing transport, fuel delivery, rescue assistance and logistical support when formal services are stretched or unavailable.

Broadband investment

Salmon farmers indicated that they invest in community broadband infrastructure. One salmon farmer invested £1.2 million in fibre infrastructure crossing the Bealach na Ba. Another salmon farmer contributed £55,000 to improve connectivity in the Sound of Mull. In addition, Mowi and SSF collaborated to provide broadband infrastructure to the Small Isles and Mallaig.

Salmon farmers indicated they invest in community broadband infrastructure, including £1.2 million investment by one salmon farmer for 26km private wire and fibre crossing the Bealach na Ba mountain pass at Applecross. This included resurfacing the road and creating passing places.

Housing

Salmon farmers proactively invest in workforce housing, to support the continued viability of salmon farming operations and the wider local economy in communities with severely constrained housing markets.



100% of responding salmon farmers own or lease residential housing for employees or contractors

Two salmon farmers indicated they provide staff housing and one indicated they provide low-cost ownership, affordable rent, or discounted self-build serviced plots. Most salmon farmers reported having active plans for further developments in consideration.



Over 120 housing units are provided by salmon farmers for over 125 workers



[Muck has a] population of 35 and Mowi employ 12 people on a 2-week shift pattern. Mowi built houses to accommodate workers on the island, provide assistance with power, water supply and connectivity.

Salmon farmer survey response

Examples of housing investments

- In response to limited affordable housing on Eday (~70 homes for ~130 residents), Scottish Sea Farms developed on site accommodation for workers on a 2-week shift pattern. A 1.5 acre plot comprises four employee homes and two short term let properties, incorporating low carbon measures.
- On Colonsay, more than 40% of properties are second homes or self-catering accommodation, contributing to housing pressures for permanent residents. Mowi has invested in affordable housing and visitor moorings to help tackle this issue.

“

“The lack of available, affordable housing is a serious challenge in the remote communities where salmon farmers operate, and salmon farmers have stepped in to supply accommodation to recruit and retain their staff.

Salmon farmer survey response





Community engagement

Salmon farmers proactively engage with the communities they operate in through formal consultation, welcoming community member views.

Community voice

All salmon farmers use formal mechanisms to engage communities, with public consultation the most consistent approach. Suppliers typically engage with communities via more informal, in-kind support such as volunteering, equipment use and specialist expertise, complementing salmon farmer-led community funds.

Salmon farmers describe community engagement as rooted in locally led conversations and long-standing community relationship. Although community engagement is clearly a priority for salmon farmers, there is no formal system for identifying under-represented groups (e.g., women, disabled people, older age groups, ethnic minorities) in the engagement process. There is an opportunity to continue evolving these approaches by supporting communities to broaden participation in ways that remain inclusive, flexible and community-defined. This could include capturing quieter or transient voices.

Community sentiment toward salmon farmers

Local sentiment was reported by salmon farmers as generally positive in rural and island communities where salmon farming provides visible employment and investment. However, salmon farmers reported a widening gap between supportive local views and more critical national sentiment. Suppliers highlighted some negative public perception, particularly on social media, and regulatory complexity as growing

challenges affecting staff morale, recruitment and community confidence. In response, salmon farmers are placing greater emphasis on ensuring that the voices of local communities and employees are more visible and better heard. This includes supporting community-led engagement, improving access to clear and relevant information, and creating more opportunities for people with direct experience of the sector to shape and share the narrative around its social and economic contribution.

Reported engagement mechanisms	Users
Public consultations	Used by all salmon farmers
Community forums	Used by two salmon farmers

Visual, noise and light pollution

Some community members expressed concerns about visual, noise and light impacts associated with salmon farm infrastructure and activity, particularly in tourist hot-spots. Salmon farmers acknowledged these impacts and reported mitigation measures such as limiting lighting and managing operational timings. Where concerns have been raised, salmon farmers have generally responded through engagement with communities. For example, when a local bed-and-breakfast questioned the visual impacts of a newly proposed site in Uist, Bakkafröst Scotland conducted a visual impact study to help address these concerns. Bakkafröst Scotland also relocated a proposed new site to an alternative location to better accommodate local fishing navigation routes. This demonstrates a willingness to work with residents and meet their specific needs.





Cultural Impacts

The key cultural impacts reported on by salmon farmers, suppliers and community representatives are summarised below.

Support for cultural activities and heritage

Salmon farmers actively support local cultural events, festivals, heritage projects, and sports through funding, volunteering, and provision of equipment, helping sustain community traditions and participation. Responses indicate that cultural investment frequently supports core community institutions (such as halls, museums, and heritage sites) which act as focal points for cultural life, rather than solely funding individual events. This strengthens the capacity of communities to independently sustain cultural expression in the long term.

Community funds offer long term community investment



100% of salmon farmers operate community funds for investing in communities across Scotland



£383k - £784k+ invested by salmon farmers via community funds per year (2020–2025)

Through their community funds, where local people ask directly for the funding that will most positively impact their lives, salmon farmers provide reliable multi-year funding to sustain shared spaces like halls, museums, and festivals that underpin community cohesion. Salmon farmers actively and mindfully provide intergenerational

support, reaching children, young people, and older residents, strengthening the sharing of language, heritage, and local knowledge across generations.

In areas facing depopulation, ageing demographics or economic changes, sustained cultural investment from salmon farmers helps communities maintain identity, confidence, and stability, acting as a stabilising influence during periods of change.

Community cohesion and involvement

Employees often live locally and participate in community life, contributing to volunteer run services, social groups, and sporting organisations, which can strengthen local connections and trust. For example, The Area Manager for Cooke Scotland in Westray was born and raised in Westray and has deep personal and professional ties to the community. This long-standing connection means they often act as the first point of contact for concerns. This was echoed by residents engaged with, and there was a strong feeling of two-way trust.



Supporting Highland Games, island festivals and shinty helps sustain traditions that matter to the communities where our staff live.

Supplier survey response

Examples of salmon farming funding community initiatives

- Sponsorship of a local music festival, football and basketball teams, historical societies, and contributions to children's play parks and community facilities by Bakkafröst Scotland in Uist.
- Mowi has supported local initiative in Uist, including the Eilean Dorcha Festival, North Uist Agricultural Show, Outward Bound, community funds, and local schools and groups.
- Cooke Scotland provided £10,000 towards a storage shed for 'Unst Fest', £3,295 for local school trips, and £10,000 for the Orkney International Island Games, as well as providing funds to the local heritage centre, care home lunch clubs, local play parks and sports teams in Unst & Yell.
- Local hall improvements, and community broadband scheme in Drimnin funded by Scottish Sea Farms.
- Sponsorship of Eday Primary School, Orkney men's and women's football teams, elderly groups, bowling clubs, and art groups, and contributions to play park renovations in Eday & Westray.

Cultural identity impacts

Salmon farming was viewed by many community members as a defining part of local identity that supports community stability. In Unst and Yell, community members felt that salmon farming is a core part of local identity, with its long-established presence supporting generational employment and enabling people to remain in the community. Others feel it has contributed to the decline of traditional livelihoods such as small scale fishing and associated cultural practices, but they recognised that this trend is difficult to attribute to a single cause.

Supporting historic identity and heritage

Salmon farmers reported a strong alignment with intangible heritage, including language, music, maritime traditions and indigenous sport such as shinty, which plays a critical role in sustaining place-based identity in island and coastal communities.

Cultural support provided by the wider supply chain



66% of suppliers report actively contributing to local culture through volunteering and in-kind contributions such as equipment and logistics



Thousands of people benefit each year from salmon farmer- and supplier-supported cultural activity

Contributions include Gaelic education and heritage projects to island festivals and community events, contributing to community cohesion.

Supporting local cultural events

- In Unst and Yell, Cooke Scotland staff provide volunteers and funding for many local groups and events, helping sustain island traditions.
- In Eday and Westray, support from Cooke Scotland includes installing Christmas lights in Westray, supplying generators for local festivals, and backing the International Island Games. SSF contributed £20,000 to the Orkney 2025 Games, donated 60kg of salmon, and provided volunteers.
- On Muck, Mowi sponsors the Small Isle Games and local festivals such as Eilean Dorcha Festival (EDF) through funding, equipment, and staff support, and brings the 'Salmon Wagon' to events, with proceeds returned locally. Mowi has also provided funding for a boat for children on the Small Isles to attend a Feis and support children's residential experiences.
- Bakkafrost Scotland and Mowi invest in heritage and culture in Uist, for example, reinforcing local language (Gaelic), supporting boat-building projects, museums, and events, encouraging staff to volunteer at festivals, and supporting the Western Isles Island Games Association (WIGGA), bringing islands together through sport and enabling regular Highland Games participation.

“

The vast majority of staff are local to the islands – that's important to help integrate the sites with local people.

MOWI representative, Uist







Environmental Impacts

Environmental impacts were not the focus of this study, however information on the industry's interaction with the environment and resulting effects on local rural and coastal communities was gathered via the surveys and community interviews. This does not intend to capture all interactions of the industry with the environment.

Reducing environmental risk

Risk reduction measures included improvements to containment, and strengthening operational resilience (for example, to storm events).



Over £23 million was invested by the industry in 2025 in measures to reduce environmental risk

Use of technology and adaptive practices

Salmon farmers reported reducing environmental impacts through improved feed monitoring using Artificial Intelligence (AI), remote and automated feeding, reduced medicines, seasonal stocking strategies, and use of locally adapted salmon stock to improve resilience and fish welfare. Investment in freshwater technologies has reduced medicine usage and supported healthy growth of stock, representing innovation and investment.

Carbon reduction through operational change

Reductions have been achieved through investment in hybrid-electric barges, improved feed efficiency, Recirculating Aquaculture Systems (RAS) expansion, lower chemical use and reduced haulage. Suppliers contribute through shared logistics, fuel-efficient vessels and low-carbon material research and development.

Salmon farmers report improvements in operational logistics, such as a shift from delivering feed via road to delivering via sea, which leads to reduced road miles and number of trips, benefiting local residents through a reduction in noise and air pollution, as well as carbon reduction impacts.

Monitoring and transparency

Ongoing environmental monitoring is undertaken year round, and salmon farmers reported using this data to help understand trends and limit future impacts. Voluntary investment includes far-field monitoring, baseline seabed surveys, freshwater mapping, wild fish monitoring and eDNA sampling. Salmon farmers publish a wide range of granular data and information on fish health, environmental performance, and regulatory compliance, on publicly available online sources. In some cases, community members were not aware of this, and therefore, additional communication on how communities can access this information could be beneficial.

Local beach cleans and recycling initiatives

- Salmon farmers are committed to supporting beach cleans across their sites, at least annually.
- Community members in Unst and Yell and Eday and Westray shared first-hand experience of salmon farmers providing volunteers for beach clean events such as the 'Great British Beach Clean' as well as much needed equipment and boats to collect waste from litter picking activities, disposing or recycling of the waste free of charge.
- Mowi contributed 630 volunteer hours for beach cleaning initiatives in 2025. In Uist, Mowi is cleaning up abandoned freshwater farms left by a previous operator over 20 years ago, and has helped enable a new local recycling enterprise, run by a young local entrepreneur, to establish operations using waste generated by fish farms. Community members shared examples of companies providing materials such as nets and pipes for agricultural and community projects, including windbreaks, fencing, polytunnels.

Supporting the circular economy

The industry is improving material sustainability, reducing site waste while creating value for local communities. Examples include repurposing farming byproducts and byproducts into biofuels, fertilisers, soil improvers and feed inputs, utilising 100% of salmon products; adopting circular inputs such as insect protein and algal oil; and reusing materials (e.g. nets, pipes) for community, agricultural and local business use.



90-95% diversion from landfill rates reported by salmon farmers

Visible local environmental action



Over 100 beach clean events supported by salmon farmers in 2025, cleaning 80+ miles of coastline

On Eday and Westray, Cooke Scotland provided boats and trained boat operators to assist with local seal rescue operations, supporting conservation in the local area.



In 2025 Bakkafrost Scotland took delivery a pyrolysis unit at its Applecross Hatchery. This is a new treatment system that will convert sludge from the recirculating aquaculture system (RAS) facility into biochar for use as a fertiliser in forestry, as part of a local circular economy scheme. It also serves as an effective method of carbon capture.

Salmon farmer survey response

Example of using local native salmon stock

In 2025, 100% of production by Bakkafrost Scotland in Uist was based on its unique Native Hebridean salmon strain, a locally developed stock that reflects the specific environmental conditions of the Outer Hebrides and has demonstrated greater resilience in the marine environment. This place-based approach strengthens Scotland's Good Food Nation ambitions by championing provenance, sustainability and responsible food production rooted in local communities. Showcased at the Royal Highland Show, it stands as a distinctive example of how aquaculture can deliver high-quality, locally adapted food while supporting long-term food security.



Operations improvement examples

- In Drimnin, Scottish Sea Farms funded the Community Broadband Scheme, which has enabled them to implement more efficient remote feeding using internet connectivity. This has helped to reduce environmental impacts and improve fish welfare.
- In Unst & Yell, Cooke Scotland has reduced the number of chemical treatments through more advanced monitoring and feeding technology.
- On Muck, Mowi has adopted a seasonal stocking strategy where fish are stocked in early autumn and harvested by mid-summer, avoiding the warmest months when jellyfish and plankton blooms are at their height. This has reduced the need for treatments.

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Taking a preventative approach:
“Our environmental contribution is primarily preventative - improving containment systems, inspections and maintenance so failures are avoided rather than responded to.

Supplier survey response







Opportunities for Delivering Additional Community Benefits

Salmon Farming already plays a significant role in delivering community benefits across Scotland. As well as continuing to deliver and expand on existing activities to support local people, there are two key areas of opportunity for further amplifying this positive impact.

Continue to improve communication with community members

The strongest opportunity identified by both salmon farmers and community members is to further improve communication between salmon farms and local communities. Sharing positive actions more widely, such as environmental performance and community benefits, alongside clear, proactive and honest communication if incidents occur, would help to further build trust between local people and salmon farms. Salmon farmers can further strengthen relationships by continuing to respond to concerns and objections quickly, openly and with evidence. Using accessible channels like social media can ensure information reaches whole communities, not just those engaged in formal meetings. Community members felt strongly that engagement activities like site visits and involvement of salmon farm staff in local events and activities strengthens the level of trust and can improve understanding of what the salmon farms do. These activities are especially important for those areas where salmon farms exist without a land-based presence.

Providing communities with reassurance about long-term plans is also important. Clear communication on future investment, resilience and local commitment can help address any local concerns, and give communities greater confidence in the sector's role in their future.

Continue to encourage more people to stay in, or return to, rural and coastal communities

Many rural and coastal Scottish communities face challenges of depopulation and ageing populations. By supporting people to stay in, or return to, these areas and by attracting a younger workforce, the salmon farming sector already plays a major role in sustaining local economies and strengthening social and cultural life.

Opportunities for further contribution include supporting community-owned and affordable housing, either through partnerships with local investment bodies or by developing homes for employees (a practice already common in the industry). There is also scope to invest in childcare, particularly for under-threes, to help parents enter or remain in the workforce, and to explore funding for services such as local ferries. Finally, continuing to encourage employees to take part in local clubs, organisations and events can further strengthen community cohesion and reinforce a strong sense of place and shared culture, an important factor in tackling depopulation.

A photograph of two men standing outdoors in the rain. The man on the left is older, wearing a brown rain jacket and a flat cap, smiling. The man on the right is younger, wearing a dark blue Helly Hansen rain jacket with the hood up, also smiling. They are holding hands. The background is a blurred outdoor scene with a road and some vegetation.

Appendix

Community Case Study Summaries

Unst & Yell (Shetland)

Salmon farmer: Cooke Scotland

Unst and Yell are two small, remote islands communities within Shetland's North Isles. Unst has a population of ~639 residents and comprises nine dispersed settlements, with employment primarily in small businesses, education, tourism, local authority services, and salmon farming. Yell has a population of ~966 and has an economy centred on agriculture, salmon farming, transport, and tourism.

Salmon farming in the area

Cooke Scotland own the salmon farming sites off the coast of Unst and Yell, freshwater operations in Unst, and a packing facility in Mid Yell. While the company's current operations have developed through a series of acquisitions since 2014, salmon farming has been a significant local employer since the 1980s.

Salmon farming is viewed by those engaged with as having a largely positive social impact, supporting growth in the local economy. The industry has built trust in the local area by prioritising local recruitment and drawing on the local talent pool.

Economic impacts

Salmon farming is a key local employer, providing over 120 jobs across Unst and Yell, offering stable, year-round work. Cooke Scotland invests in future talent, with 4-5 apprentices hired in recent years, building and developing local skillsets. Cooke Scotland also supports local businesses by creating indirect employment opportunities, including supporting the employment of 2 drivers in a local haulage company.

Social and cultural impacts

Cooke Scotland has defibrillators at all sites, enhancing community emergency response. Employees use local ferry services, supporting their viability, though some community members note increased competition for limited capacity; this is mitigated through measures such as staff minibuses between Mainland Shetland and Yell. Targeted infrastructure investment, including pier upgrades, has improved safety, added amenities like a pleasure craft walkway, and enabled a small mussel farm. Employees also volunteer with essential services such as the fire service, coastguard, and ambulance service.

Through long-term job creation and local recruitment, the industry is embedded in the area's cultural identity, supporting generational employment and enabling people to remain locally. Cooke Scotland contributes to community life via its community fund, supporting assets such as the heritage centre, parks, and sports teams, alongside targeted funding of £11,500 for renewable energy upgrades at the community hall, £10,000 for Unst Fest infrastructure and maintenance, and £10,000 for local school trips.

Environmental impacts

Cooke Scotland regularly participates in beach cleans, and prioritises recycling and reuse of materials such as pipes and nets. These materials are repurposed locally for activities including crofting, drainage, and polytunnel construction, providing practical benefits to the community.



Figure 3
Unst & Yell in the Shetland Isles

Muck (Inner Hebrides)

Salmon farmer: Mowi

The Isle of Muck is a small island in the Inner Hebrides, covering ~1,500 acres with a close-knit community of ~35 residents. The main businesses are sheep and cattle farms, tourism and salmon farming.

Salmon farming in the area

Mowi own the salmon farming site on the island of Muck and have been operating since 2014. The site is mainly a growing site, focused on daily fish husbandry activities such as health checks, environmental monitoring, and stock management.

The salmon farm provides clear socio-economic benefits, including well paid year-round employment, staff housing, training, and funding for community facilities. Community members interviewed were positive about the impact of the farm on the local area. Some community members reported concerns around visual and noise impacts, and transparency around environmental impacts. These are being actively mitigated by Mowi.

Economic impacts

Mowi provides a small number of on-island jobs, with additional staff commuting from nearby areas on a 2-weeks-on, 2-weeks-off rota, supporting flexible regional employment. The company invests in workforce development through training and certifications that build transferable skills, and supports local transport and service providers, contributing to the local economy. Mowi owns 3 staff houses that help attract and retain island workers.

These houses are to be returned to the community after use to increase local housing availability and provide additional jobs through cleaning services.

Social and cultural impacts

Mowi provides essential transport and emergency support during extreme weather, offering capacity beyond local ferry services, including the transport of vital supplies such as food and fuel. The company maintains strong relationships with local residents, supporting activities such as sheep shearing and sharing materials for reuse, including providing ropes for community projects.

Mowi has responded to concerns about visual and noise impacts from salmon farming infrastructure by limiting lighting and managing operational timings to reduce disturbance. The company also supports local culture by sponsoring events such as the Small Isles Games and local festivals, providing funding, equipment, and staff.

Some residents noted that salmon farming expansion has coincided with declines in traditional livelihoods such as crofting and small-scale fishing, though this is difficult to attribute solely to the industry; overall, salmon farming has contributed to local economic growth. Mowi also operates a community fund for Muck and manages community moorings, donating 100% of visiting boat income to the primary school fund.

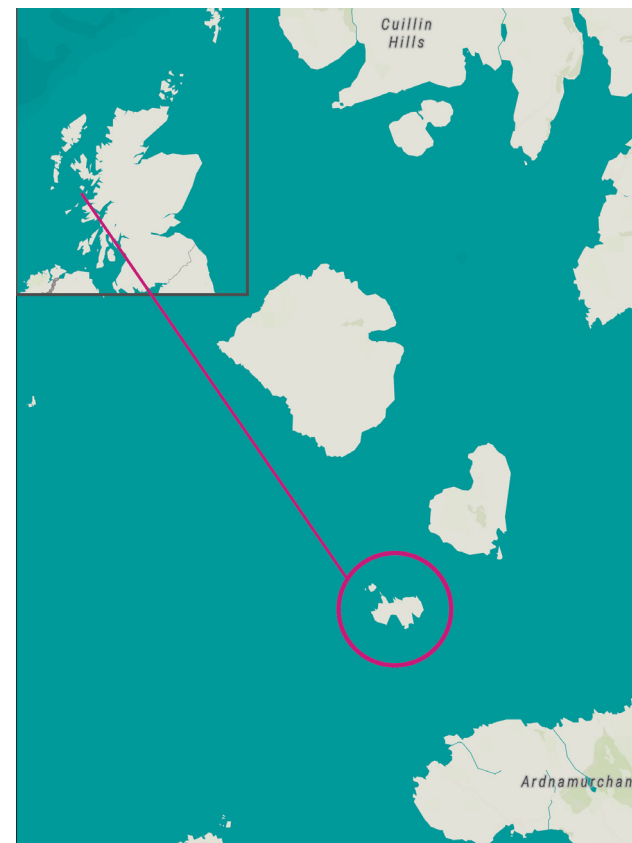


Figure 4
Muck in the Inner Hebrides

Environmental impacts

Mowi conducts annual beach cleans alongside daily monitoring and sampling to better understand site conditions and reduce future impacts. Although this data is publicly available online, some interviewed residents were unaware of it, indicating a need for improved communication. The company has also adopted a seasonal stocking approach to avoid periods of higher ecological risk, including times when local ecosystems are more sensitive.

Drimnin (Highlands)

Salmon farmer: Scottish Sea Farms

Drimnin is a small, remote settlement on the Morvern peninsula in the Highlands, with its economic activity being linked to tourism (for example, the Drimnin Estate and distillery which employs ~15 people) and a small number of crofters.

Salmon farming in the area

The SSF Fiunary salmon farming site is ~4 miles south of Drimnin, with the majority of employees living and working on Mull. The farm does not have a land presence on the Morvern peninsula.

The site has a relatively minor direct impact on the Drimnin community as there are no direct employees hired by SSF from Drimnin, and there are very limited facilities to benefit from the industry (e.g. no local shop or school). The main impacts cited by residents are those relating to SSF's funding and ongoing support of broadband infrastructure.

Economic impacts

SSF has made a significant contribution to the Drimnin community through funding a community broadband scheme, improving connectivity for households and businesses, supporting home working, and reducing internet costs. This has also enabled local businesses to continue to operate, including the local distillery, while also supporting SSF's more efficient remote feeding systems.

Social and cultural impacts

Improved internet access via the SSF-funded broadband scheme has enhanced access to essential services, including communication and online shopping, particularly given the long distances to the nearest supermarket. SSF has improved network resilience through protective measures and backup systems during extreme weather.

SSF is working to minimise operational impacts, taking steps to reduce noise and lighting from night-time activities. It operates within a changing cultural landscape where traditional fishing industries have declined due to multiple factors; while some concerns have been raised, others recognise SSF as part of a broader economic transition that cannot be attributed to one industry alone.

SSF also funds community projects such as village hall renovations and provides specialist IT support for maintaining the broadband network, including having an SSF representative on the scheme's board. This ongoing involvement has strengthened local capacity, with SSF personnel now playing a key role in managing the service.

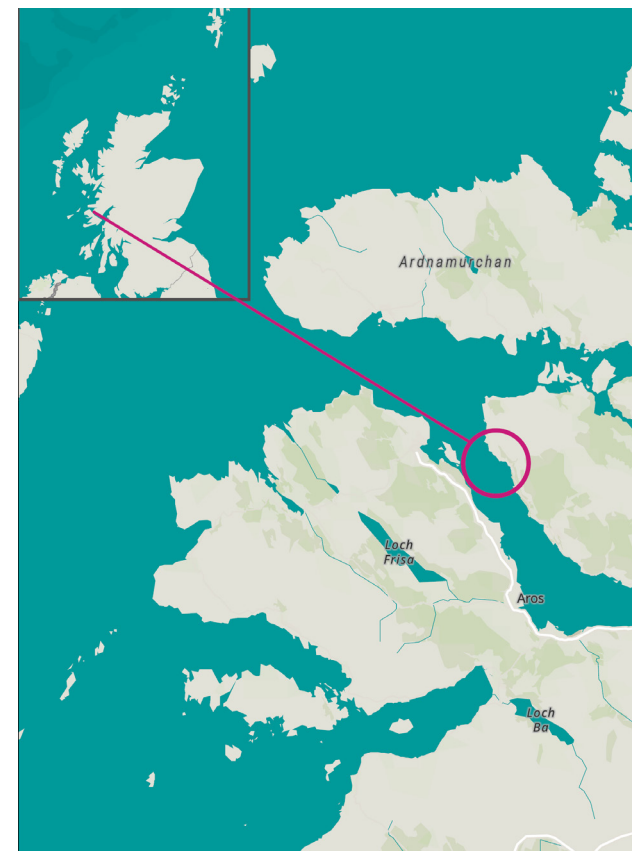


Figure 5
Drimnin on the Morvern Peninsula

Environmental impacts

SSF has taken steps to improve environmental performance, including using enhanced broadband connectivity to implement more precise remote feeding, reducing waste and supporting fish welfare. Community feedback highlights an opportunity to increase visibility and engagement on environmental actions and local conditions, such as marine litter. Initiatives like community clean-up activities in the Drimnin area, alongside clearer communication, could help demonstrate active environmental efforts.

Uist (Na h-Eileanan Siar)

Salmon farmers: Bakkafrøst Sotland and Mowi

Uist is a chain of interconnected islands in the Outer Hebrides, comprising North Uist, Benbecula, and South Uist. There are five settlements in North Uist and seven in South Uist. Key industries include construction, health and social care, education, retail, agriculture, salmon farming, and fishing. The population is dispersed, and transport, both within Uist and to the mainland, can be difficult due to adverse weather and unreliable links.

Salmon farming in the area

Bakkafrøst Scotland and Mowi operate multiple salmon farming sites across Uist, covering the full production cycle from smolt to harvest. Bakkafrøst Scotland also runs a hatchery supporting a Native Hebridean salmon breeding programme, developing a distinctive, place-based product suited to local environmental conditions. Salmon farming has been present in the area since the 1970s.

The sector is a major economic contributor, offering stable, well-paid jobs relative to other local industries. It also supports local spending through contractors, services, and supply chains, while providing training, apprenticeships, and community support through volunteering, funding, and resource sharing.

Economic impacts

Salmon farmers provide local employment with over 50 staff in Uist, and are investing in future skills through training, school engagement, and 3 recent apprenticeships. Bakkafrøst Scotland's broodstock selection in Uist created 11 new roles

and provides work placements in collaboration with DYW Western Isles and Sgoil Lionacleit (Benbecula). Both companies contribute to the wider economy by supporting hauliers, smokehouses, and local supply chains, while employee spending and contractor visits benefit businesses such as cafés and Bed-and-breakfasts.

Social and cultural impacts

Salmon farmers support communities by offering training (e.g. sea survival courses for fishers) and installing publicly accessible defibrillators. Staff also contribute time and equipment, including transporting livestock and supporting local events. Some residents note that higher wages in salmon farming may draw workers away from sectors such as hospitality.

Both companies engage with communities on development plans, including conducting visual impact assessments and adjusting site locations in response to feedback. While some concerns remain around operational traffic and noise, salmon farmers continue efforts to minimise disruption.

Bakkafrøst Scotland and Mowi also support local culture through funding and volunteering. This cultural and heritage-related support includes contributions to music festivals, sports teams, heritage organisations, parks and museums. For example, Bakkafrøst Scotland reports providing approximately £20,000-£30,000 per quarter in support of local cultural and community initiatives, while Mowi contributed over £23,000 to cultural and heritage projects across Uist and Barra in 2025*.

* These figures relate specifically to examples of cultural and heritage activities and do not represent the companies' total annual community investment.



Figure 6
Uist in Na h-Eileanan Siar

Environmental impacts

Mowi contributed 630 volunteer hours for beach cleaning initiatives in 2025. In Uist, Mowi is cleaning up abandoned freshwater farms left by a previous operator over 20 years ago, and has helped enable a new local recycling enterprise, run by a young local entrepreneur, to establish operations using waste generated by fish farms. Community members shared examples of companies providing materials such as nets and pipes for agricultural and community projects, including windbreaks, fencing, polytunnels.

Environmental performance is also improving through operational innovation; for example, 100% of Bakkafrøst Scotland's production in Uist used local fish stock last year, demonstrating increased resilience to sea lice and disease.

Eday and Westray (Orkney)

Salmon farmers: Cooke Scotland and Scottish Sea Farms

Westray is one of Orkney's northern isles, the sixth largest by area, with a population of around 600 and Pierowall as its main village. Work is predominantly in farming and fishing with tourism mainly in the summer months. Key community-identified development priorities include education and training, housing, industry, transport, community spaces, the environment, and youth and children. Eday is a smaller northern isle with a population of fewer than 150, where the local economy is largely based on farming and crofting, alongside some renewable energy and tourism activity.

Salmon farming in the area

Cooke Scotland has 7 operational sites with 5 in Westray and 2 in Stronsay, and SSF has 4 farms in the North Isles, including on Eday. Salmon farming has been in the area since the late 1980s, initially as family-run salmon farms.

Salmon farming operations have a substantial positive economic and social impact on the local area, providing stable, well-paid employment that supports local businesses and services, while helping to counter population decline by attracting and retaining working-age families.

Economic impacts

Local salmon farmers are major employers in Orkney, supporting around 115 jobs, and provide training in marine operations, health and safety, and apprenticeships. They support the local economy by using local transport, marine, and engineering services. High wages, staff accommodation,

and rotational work patterns attract and retain a younger workforce, boosting local spending and sustaining businesses, schools, and community services.

Social and cultural impacts

Salmon farmers are helping address local housing shortages, with SSF delivering a 1.5-acre development on Eday including 4 employee homes and 2 short-term lets, built with low-carbon technologies and supporting local contractors.

They also support community needs by providing vessels, crews, and equipment for events and emergencies, including transporting essential supplies and medical staff during disruptions. Community feedback is generally positive, though some anecdotal concerns, particularly from a Papa Westray resident, highlight visual impacts in areas with fewer direct local benefits.

Salmon farmers support cultural activities through funding events, festivals, and sport; for example, SSF contributed £20,000 to the 2025 Orkney Island Games, alongside donating 60kg of salmon and staff time. Strong local ties, reinforced by long-standing employees active in community life, have built trust and high acceptance, though some pressures remain, such as skills competition with traditional trades.



Figure 7
Eday and Westray in the Orkney Isles

Environmental impacts

Salmon farmers participate in initiatives such as the Great British Beach Clean and local 'Bag the Bruck' campaigns, helping to remove marine litter. They also supported wildlife response efforts; for example, in a one-off instance, Cooke provided boats and trained operators to assist with a local seal rescue.

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