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Planning application 14/02249/MFF – Modification of existing fin fish farm site comprising six additional cages etc. Port Na Mine Fish Farm (Etive 3)

FoLE wishes to object to the above application as it currently stands, as it is not compliant with the Loch Etive ICZM Plan.

Local Plan Policy LP Aqua 1 requires that the ICZM Plan must be considered as a significant material consideration in assessing any proposal.

On that basis, FoLE believes the application should be refused.

The Etive 3 fish-farm is within Policy Zone E of the ICZM Plan and, as the Council accepts, there is a presumption against new aquaculture development in that zone. The only scope for maximising trout production is via consolidation and rationalisation of existing sites.

In this context, in its Screening Opinion, the Council makes reference to the recent removal of the farm at Etive 1 (Inverawe West).

As the Council is aware, the planning permission granted earlier this year for Etive 6, at Sailean Ruadh, carried with it a section 75 agreement requiring the permanent removal of the fish farm equipment at Etive 1, which was also within Policy Zone E.

By way of the section 75 agreement, the Council has attempted to require, inter alia, the permanent removal of cages from Etive 1 (Inverawe West) in order to provide for what the Council considers to be sufficient landscape mitigation for the grant of planning permission for the very large new farm at Etive 6.

Of course, that agreement remains the subject of judicial review proceedings. FoLE's view is that the agreement is unlawful, but the Council is defending its position.

FoLE considers that it would be unlawful for the Council now to grant planning permission for the modification of existing cages and placing of six new cages and feed barge at Etive 3, constituting a very significant increase in the overall surface equipment at Etive 3, on the basis that the removal of Etive 1 has, in any way, 'made room' for an expansion at Etive 3 in Policy Zone E.

In short, the Council should not 'double count' the effect of the removal of Etive 1.

The Council must also take into account that the removal of Etive 1 has, in fact, made no difference to the overall landscape impact of trout farms within Policy Zone E. The Etive 1 and Etive 2 sites were never used together and never had cages on site at both sites at once, as the ICZM Plan records. Since the removal of Etive 1, Etive 2 now has cages on site permanently. The net landscape effect of removing Etive 1, within Policy Zone E, has been nil.

Further, the extent of the expansion proposed at Etive 3 can in no way be mitigated for by the earlier removal of the two defunct shellfish operations. By any reasonable yardstick, the six new cages, enlarged existing cages and permanently moored feed barge, constitute a massive increase in the overall landscape impact of aquaculture in Zone E over what existed in 2011.

In conclusion, the application, as it stands, cannot be considered to be compliant with the Loch Etive ICZM Plan as it applies to Policy Zone E and should be refused.

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We refer to the Biomass and In-feed Treatment Modelling Report, submitted as Attachment 4 to the above planning application. This Report details the use of the Autodepomod model to support the proposed increase in biomass at Etive 3.

On page 8 of 17 of that Report, it is confirmed that Autodepomod version 2.0.52, 17th August 2005, was used to carry out the modelling.

Loch Etive is, of course, not a typical seawater loch. It is brackish and the upper basin of the loch, within which the Port Na Mine fish-farm is located, has unique characteristics.

FoLE is aware that the Autodepomod software, as originally produced, was not suitable for application in brackish water sites.

Please could you confirm whether an updated Autodepomod model, suitable for brackish water, was used in this instance?

Loch Etive's upper basin is also prone to anoxia, due to its reduced flushing time and the nature of the seabed topography. Loch Etive is considered to be the sea-loch most prone to hypoxia on west coast.

This has implications for the expansion of aquaculture in the upper basin, which involves a considerable increase in input of organic matter (waste food and faeces) into the water column and onto the sea-bed.

The Loch Etive ICZM Plan, on page 139, notes that for Policy Zone E - where Port Na Mine is located - "*limited water exchange in this policy zone may restrict aquaculture development in terms of availability of plankton for shellfish and flushing of excess wastes/nutrients from fin fish farming*". Further, on page 141, the Plan notes that "*any proposal to significantly increase trout farming in this policy zone should consider whether the increase nutrient and waste input would exacerbate naturally occurring low dissolved oxygen levels*".

Please could you indicate how both the Council's screening opinion and the modelling methods used by the applicant have taken into account the poor water exchange and slow flushing rate in the upper basin of Loch Etive and the consequent risk of exacerbating the anoxia issue in the upper basin by increasing organic discharges?