

# Marine Harvest jobs are secure: Feenstra

Jan Feenstra the Managing Director at Marine Harvest in Ireland has confirmed that their fish farm sites on Lough Swilly and in Mulroy Bay are to be closed for periods over the next two years as the company battles the problem of Amoebic Gill Damage.

**By John McAteer**

The decision will impact on around twenty members of staff who have been offered alternative positions within Donegal or they have the option of accepting redundancy. The decision was announced to staff on Tuesday. And despite the problems

encountered in recent months with fish deaths, Mr. Feenstra said the 270 jobs there are safe and Marine Harvest's future in Ireland is not under any threat.

Mr. Feenstra said their operations on Lough Swilly will see a fallowing period coming into place in the Spring of next year and the decision to reopen is dependent on the licensing protocols. Mulroy Bay will cease to operate for a three months period at the beginning 2014 and no job losses are envisaged says the company.

The Amoebic Gill disease which is caused by high

sea temperatures and lack of oxygen in the water has wiped out a large volume of mature harvest stock this summer. While the rate of deaths has now stabilised, the problem has not gone away. However, Mr. Feenstra said that he is confident the problem will not have any major impact on their long-term future in Ireland. The company is based at Kindrum on Mulroy Bay and they employ a staff of 270.

The company has already said their volume of salmon for harvesting for the 2013 season will be seriously reduced. Mr. Feenstra now

says the volume for next year will be reduced by 50%. However he said that plans are underway to put more 'salmon to sea' for the 2014 harvest and at that point the situation should have returned to normal.

Since last winter, said a Marine Harvest engineer, water temperatures are typically 4/5 degrees higher than normal and that is the kernel of the problem.

Amoebic Gill Damage (AGD) is a naturally occurring condition of Atlantic salmon caused by a number of microscopic amoeba-type organism which bloom in the sea as part of the

plankton causing irritation of the fish.

The increased occurrence of such blooms around Ireland is believed to be mainly due to the mild winter of 2011/2012 and high summer rainfall loading coastal waters with nutrients from the land.

In recent years there have also been reports on this from Norway, USA, Canada, Chile and most recently from Ireland and Scotland.

Fish can be relieved from the condition by immersion in fresh water but the effectiveness of this remedy is limited by the logistical

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challenge of providing significant volumes of freshwater at sea.

It is expected that falling marine water temperatures approaching the winter will facilitate the healthy recovery of remaining stocks at the Marine Harvest sites. AGD Symptoms typically begin to appear two months after the fish are transferred from freshwater hatcheries to open net sea cages. Symptoms include mucus build-up on the gills of infected fish and hyper-plastic lesions, causing white spots and eventual deterioration of the gill tissue. Contributing factors are an ambient water temperature above 16 degrees Celsius.