

The Grower

Newsletter for the Association of Scottish Shellfish Growers

April 2024



Isle of Mull Oysters gains ASC accreditation



Isle of Mull Oysters is now the first oyster company in Scotland to gain the Aquaculture Stewardship Council's accreditation. Gordon Turnbull was his usual modest self in talking about this achievement but was clearly pleased. Not least because there has been a huge amount of work involved and the difficulty was putting together the paperwork required to translate what was already undertaken informally into something that met the professional standards required. Gordon was pleased to find that his record keeping and what was done on the farm was up to scratch and was grateful for the support from SSMG on areas of HR etc that were in need of something more formal.

Gordon is happy to be farming a species that is of positive benefit both to the environment and to the consumer, and also working through the cooperative system of Scottish Shellfish Marketing Group (SSMG) suits his philosophy. The main thing is that without this accreditation Isle of Mull Oysters cannot access British supermarkets. And Waitrose needs these oysters all the way from Mull.



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Advertising

The Grower is distributed to all members of the ASSG, to policy makers and scientists with interest in shellfish and is sent electronically all over the world to shellfish farmers and their ilk. It is also available online at www.assg.org.uk Why not advertise to our specialist readership?

The Grower is a quarterly newsletter edited by Janet H. Brown, The Shellfish Team, jan.brown.shellfishteam@outlook.com

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For further information see our web site at www.assg.org.uk

Disclaimer: Views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the official view of the Association

The Oyster Restoration Company's move to Aultbea signals growth and innovation

The Oyster Restoration Company has relocated from its former site in Orkney to the picturesque shores of Aultbea, Northwest Scotland. The transition from their previous site in Orkney (previously shared with Orkney Shellfish Hatchery) marks a significant milestone for the company, underscoring its commitment to expansion and innovation, propelling them towards a future of increased production and broader impact within the shellfish industry.

Led by experienced hatchery manager, Anna Overweter, the on-site team at Aultbea has seamlessly integrated into the local community, fostering a positive environment for growth and collaboration. Anna said, "we've settled in really well and have been welcomed by the community."

The relocation to Aultbea brings a substantial increase in production capacity. The scaling up of operations signifies a shift towards serving larger markets and meeting the growing demand for spat supply to farmers across the UK in significant quantities, offering both singles and spat on shell.

The choice of Aultbea as the new location was deliberate, with the site's former history as a salmon farm offering prime conditions for the business. The favourable water quality and optimal location were key factors in the decision-making process. Acquired in Autumn 2022, the site has been transformed and repurposed to accommodate native oysters.

The infrastructure at the new site is designed to support enhanced production capabilities, featuring dedicated spaces such as an algae room, nursery room, and a broodstock library.

Dr. Nik Sachlikidis, CEO of The Oyster Restoration Company, emphasised the significance of the move, "the new farm will provide a consistent supply of native oysters to farmers in the UK, as well as to the emerging restoration market."

With expanded production capacity and a strategic focus on meeting market demand, The Oyster Restoration Company are poised to make a lasting impact within the shellfish industry, both domestically and beyond.

If you would like to buy spat, or are interested in working with The Oyster Restoration Company you can contact commercial@oysterrestorationcompany.co.uk



Dates for your diary

Aquaculture UK
Aviemore
May 14-15, 2024

SAGB Annual Conference
London
May 28-29, 2024

AQUA 2024 – Blue Food, Green Solutions
Copenhagen, Denmark,
August 26-30, 2024

Stranraer Oyster Festival
September 13-15, 2024

ICSR
Jekyll Island, Georgia,
September 15-18, 2024

ASSG Annual Conference
Oban, UK
October 29-30, 2024

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CEO's Column

Nick's Notes

Stopping the tide

Spring, the period for regrowth and renewal, must seem a long way off for many. The winds of change appear to be turning the tide in the wrong direction while the World appears indolent. Hopefully, nations emerging from winter slumber will mean the spring is not lost in future years and the tide will be turned by those with a sense of justice and longer-term self-interest?

Cautiously optimistic

While the festive season is well behind us and the delights of a full mail box on St Valentines Day is a distant memory (regrettably solely marketing junk mail!) it is always good to reflect on market opportunities. These periods being extremely important for both fresh seafood and prepared celebratory meals. The term "cautiously optimistic" always make me smile as when it comes to the financial markets and the likely performance of funds, financial advisors frequently seem to use the term. The only downside often being that their management fee exceeds the gain from the investments made – but they are cautiously optimistic that performance will get better! (I am never clear whether it is their performance or the markets which they are alluding to improving?)

Well cautious optimism in the current climate is always worth promoting as we can all hope that we have seen the back of inflation and highly important rising energy costs. Producing fresh seafood is an extremely climate friendly process and of course bivalve shellfish are at the head of the queue to rightfully receive all the accolades going in this respect. However, as soon as we remove them from the water the cool chain needs to kick in. Keeping fresh produce "fresh" has always been a key requirement to maintain quality. While in our winter months maintaining the chill chain is relatively straight forward (!), as temperatures rise (both sea and air) and distance to market may increase - so do overall production costs.

Can we pass such costs on to the consumers – well we can try – but market conditions are tough at present with all sectors of the economy dealing with cost-of-living implications. All fresh food producers – whether supplying local or national outlets are having to look for the most cost-effective solutions. Fresh and local are two words which are often seen used in tandem and are frequently utilised to indicate quality seafood supplies. Local food production plans are something I will pick up later in my "Notes".

Move the mountain?

Given that we are growing our shellfish in some of the most remote areas of the Highlands and Islands of



Dr Nick Lake, CEO of the Association of Scottish Shellfish Growers (ASSG)

Scotland we are always going to be faced with the issue of securing market access. The bulk of the population live in the central belt of Scotland and our markets often lie with the UK and multiple retailers, who stock both fresh and importantly processed products – which maintains the convenience and quality for consumers.

I realise the above paragraph contains a frowned-upon expression of the remoteness of our production areas? Given the demographics and Scottish population decline – particularly in locations such as the Highlands and Islands, the Scottish Government feels that we should not refer to such areas as remote? This is presumed to infer those residents are isolated and would wish to be less so? Equally that anywhere deemed remote would not encourage new (or younger) residents to settle?

I think that I can safely say that being remote has many advantages for the quality of seafood that can be produced and consumed (and the quality of life in general!). Indeed, tourism in the Highlands and Islands continues to expand post Covid with the North Coast 500 tourist route being a notable success in terms of footfall (or should that be wheel spin as most are in camper vans or cars?)

Experiencing the remoteness of the region and the quality of the seafood that can be accessed locally, is one of the benefits of visiting the Highlands and Islands and hopefully the memories are transported home at the end of such visits.

The real benefit of such tourism is that those happy holiday memories of food and drink along with some fantastic scenery and weather (OK - weather may be a challenge some times?) will translate into a desire to source and consume Scottish shellfish throughout the year and within the UK or beyond?

Hence even if our small-scale sales of fresh shellfish are to local hotels or hostels, the availability and quality will hopefully translate to additional consumers when they see the Scottish branded products in their local high street retailer or restaurant.

If we can't initially move the "mountain" to the consumer at a reasonable cost, we can hopefully encourage the consumer to visit and appreciate that the "mountain" is worth investing in both during their holiday and when at home. Equally, where we have a "mountain" of shellfish to distribute we of course can be looking at an economy of scale which reduces the unit cost passed to the consumer.

CEO's Column cont.

Messaging

Goodness knows we are all constantly bombarded by multi-media messaging of what we should buy, where we should buy it, how environmentally friendly the product is, what is good for our health, what will make us happier in our lives and how successful a purchase will make us! This can be for anything from a new car to a brand of tooth paste.

When it comes to food products the dairy industry is large and well-resourced in promoting brands, while for beef and lamb the promotion is more generic based on long established trade boards. Eggs tend to be promoted by brands and chicken products often follow suit. When you consider the wild fishery products, we have the leading brands able to promote individual products. For those of a certain age brought up on terrestrial television the sight and sound of Captain Birdseye will be likely affectionately remembered for a favourite product (Fish Fingers anyone?).

While the multiple retailers are happy to stock such brands and products on the basis of volume sales, it has always been a struggle to get shelf space for our shellfish products.

Fresh shellfish are a niche product and currently likely only sought by a discerning consumer during high days and holidays. Cooked shellfish products are a more widely available and accessible format with an extended appeal as a meal in itself. Hence these should have a place in the multiple retailer's chill cabinet and be accessible to the widest possible range of consumers.

The question becomes how do we get the individual customer and indeed multiple individual customers to seek out such shellfish products in their favourite and trusted retail store? Fundamentally of course we need to convince those retailers in the first instance that the products are worth stocking, pass all their food safety and chill chain criteria and importantly that they will make a profit. Our fantastic green credentials and back stories of remote production in a wonderful environment can help – but I suspect is only a small part of the equation for most retailers. More importantly how do we encourage those customers to choose the Scottish branded shellfish product over all the other protein options and food products available to them?

Good question I hear you say!

Herculean task

As ever you would not expect me to come up with any instantaneous answers as this has taxed the minds of our leading shellfish producers and distributors for a considerable time!

The formation of the Scottish Shellfish Marketing Group (SSMG Ltd) in the early 1990s was on the basis that in order to grow the production sector there was a need to be able to secure volumes of shellfish. These had to be of sufficient quality and quantity to justify investment in facilities and processing capabilities. The objective being to create sufficient interest from wider sales outlets including the multiple retail sector.

Much work has been done by the Scottish Shellfish producer's co-operative in the intervening years. Indeed, the increase in the scale of shellfish production in Scotland can be closely aligned with an increase in available market opportunities.

However, we are still faced with the question of how do we get more consumers to choose the option of a shellfish meal over any other option whether they are at home, eating out locally or on their holidays in a camper van?

Within the industry we are all aware of the wonderful qualities of bivalve shellfish in terms of their production, environmental impacts, healthy eating, climate change and biodiversity credentials and most importantly nutritious and tasty meal options! However, have we spent enough time and effort trying to promote these messages?

Well clearly not, or possibly we have simply failed collectively to make the right noises to the right consumer groups that value and can afford to routinely purchase high quality Scottish bivalve shellfish as meal options?

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CEO's Column cont.

Brand Ambassador

I am delighted to say that shellfish growers are not alone in their desire to develop the Scottish bivalve shellfish production industry! Crown Estate Scotland has recognised a similar objective of utilising the Scottish marine estate for the widest community and economic benefit, identifying food production through shellfish aquaculture as a sustainable use of the available resource.

Elsewhere in this copy of The Grower (*see page 7 Ed*) you will find an introductory article from Kelly Wright, the newly appointed Brand Ambassador for Scottish farmed shellfish. I am extremely pleased to welcome Kelly into the realms of truly sustainable shellfish production. Equally to thank Crown Estate Scotland for having the foresight and vision in making this investment on the basis of seeing the potential for expansion of the sector, whether through small or large-scale businesses. The key point being that all outputs require to find appropriate markets and these will be likely to develop further if consumers are convincingly advised of the positive benefits of Scottish bivalve shellfish production in the round.

This is a huge task to take on and will need a clear focus and boundless energy to implement. I am sure our members will be happy to steer the conversation and make their views known on what is required. I am also aware that as a sector we have lacked a comprehensive social media presence and without pre judging any initiatives Kelly will be planning to initiate, new eyes and perspectives on what can potentially be achieved is very much to be welcomed.

Nourish Scotland

It may have passed many by that the Scottish Government recently gained parliamentary approval for the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act 2022. This requires a National Good Food Nation Plan to be established. Objectives include; to improve the social and economic wellbeing of the Scottish population; protect the environment which supports food production; improve health; support economic development; assure

animal welfare and; educate the public on food and its production. Obviously, seafood should be very much a key element of any Scottish food plan given our dominant production, and of course bivalve shellfish would be able to tick all the objectives.

The National Good Food Nation Plan is out for consultation and I am aware that some members have already engaged with the process.

Importantly the national perspective will feed into a local level agenda and the legislation requires Local Authorities/ Councils to compile and implement Local Good Food Nation Plans. These will be reviewed every five years to determine what progress has been made.

Clearly farmed shellfish should be a strong element of local food production in the maritime Local Authority areas and of course we have a nutritional profile which should complement all other food (and drink) production within an area.

For those interested Nourish Scotland is a registered charity supported to take the lead on bringing together food and drink related interest groups to help formulate such plans www.nourishscotland.org

The themes of local / fresh / and nutritious should be to the fore in such local authority plans and hopefully such provisions will feed through into the local structure plans guiding developments. Oyster and mussel production sites are dependent on gaining planning consent from the local authority and being a highly sustainable food production and environmentally friendly activity, which enhances biodiversity, hopefully the requirement to produce such low carbon food will be recognised in the planning consent processes.

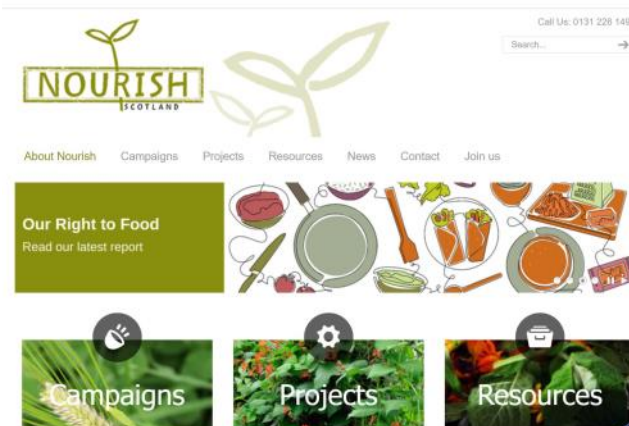
Plus of course this presents a great opportunity to educate our tourist visitors to the delights of locally produced Scottish shellfish!

Easter Bunnies

Hopefully you will be reading this after a great Easter Egg Hunt and an Easter Sunday lunch starting with shellfish and finishing off with a piece of Simnel cake and a cup of tea!

All the best

Nick

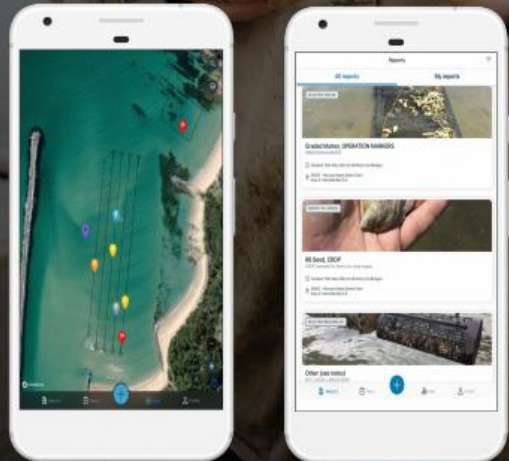


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Introducing the Brand Ambassador for Scottish farmed shellfish

Kelly Wright

This new role, funded by Crown Estate Scotland, has been created to enhance the profile of the Scottish bivalve industry and to actively advance the industry's social licence direct to consumers, buyers and future stakeholders. My responsibility is to be an industry representative and promoter, the one person that is always flying the flag and pushing their way to the front of the queue to be heard within the industry and beyond. Here's a little about my back story.

Aged 26 I walked into the reception of a smelly fish factory in Hull, Marr Foods. I reasoned with myself that this was only temporary while I completed my business degree. The smell of fish faded and my love for seafood grew. 26 years later the industry still has this strange hold on me, a feeling I'm sure many of you can relate to.

Apart from a brief stint in the world of fresh produce and the last 5 years starting my own ethical business, most of my career has been in Seafood. A career that has given me lifelong friends and the unique opportunity to visit places I would never have gone to; Faroe Islands, Indonesia, Iceland, Norway and of course the Highlands & Islands of Scotland. It also taught me skills I would never have learnt; de-veining and shelling prawns, de-bearding mussels, and how to hold a live king crab!

Having lived and worked in Scotland for 15 years now I was delighted to be given the opportunity to help raise the profile of Scottish Farmed Shellfish and come back into the industry that has given me so much joy over the years. Next on my 'to do' list - shucking an oyster!

From the early part of my career, I have been in front of major retailers, even working in Asda's head office for 3 years as category marketing manager (implant) and more latterly, working very closely with Waitrose in my role as Commercial Director for Young's Seafood for 9 years. Understanding these important customers will be key to unlocking some of the opportunities we have ahead of us.

The most significant thing that has happened to me over the last 5 years is that I left secure employment to start my own business. Having gained a good understanding of the world of packaging and particularly plastic through my work with the Waitrose Producers' Group, I decided that the pace of change to reduce plastic in retail was too slow and I would open my own plastic free grocery store. As you can imagine everyone thought I was mad. To be honest I'm still not sure if my decision was driven by concern for the environment or a mid-life crisis. In the end it doesn't matter as I'm immensely proud of what I've achieved and the impact that I have made.

Starting a business from scratch is not for the faint hearted and it's given me a new appreciation for everyone that runs their own business, big or small. It will now be my absolute pleasure to be able to support other business owners to sell more of their products.

What I'm excited about the most is the fantastic environmental story that there is to tell. Having lived, worked and breathed in this space for the last 5 years I cannot stress enough how important this is for this industry and everyone impacted by it. Rural



communities are so much more vulnerable to climate change as this not only affects the place they live but their livelihoods too. Rising sea temperatures will have a catastrophic impact on marine biodiversity and although it's not yet known how this will affect mussel spat or mortality rates, any change in the environment of any species could lead to increased risk of disease and death.

Right now, we have some of the most sustainable farmed proteins on the planet and we should be shouting this from the rooftops!

We also have an industry that works co-operatively to ensure those big and small can prosper in markets that can be challenging and sometimes technically overwhelming. Co-operatives promote a sense of community and the transfer of knowledge which is going to be vital for succession planning in an industry that has an ageing demographic.

The Grower asked me to write a regular feature for the newsletter, which I'm delighted to do. I'm no expert on dropper ropes, or lock distribution of a shellfish basket but hopefully I can offer a fresh perspective and a positive voice and advocacy for the future of Scottish Shellfish Farming.



Pictured above; Kelly with Douglas Wilson and Cameron Maclean of Inverlussa Mussels on her recent introductory visit to Mull.

Shellfish Culture 1 - held over from NORA 5 - Oysters and place names

Janet H Brown

The strangest feeling, where am I? I had travelled down from Scotland through England, Belgium and Holland and found myself sitting at the table eating lasagne surrounded by delightful company from many parts of the world but the music was unaccompanied Gaelic singing. Hence the wondering, where am I and who was this singing unaccompanied? (continued below photo)



On the last day of the conference all became much clearer. This was Dr Alasdair Whyte from the Isle of Mull who has written a PhD thesis on Gaelic place names and is currently doing a post doc on the same topic. Studies such as this can illustrate facts from the past, and of relevance to the conference he gave examples of how this may relate to the presence or historical presence of oysters. Names such as Eilean nan Eisirein (Island of the oyster) in the southwest of Mull and Àird nan Eisirein, the headland of the oyster at the head of Loch Na Keal.

It is not just the place names he is studying. It is the information that the place names can provide. The relative importance of shellfish is just one example and how this is illustrated in local sayings such as, “when the sheep is thin the shellfish is fat!” -illustrating the seasonality of life, “as full as a creel of shellfish” which suggests historic plenty of the sea and “Anna has a multitude of things to do between dulse and shellfish” suggesting that there was plenty of hard work involved. No doubt they trip off the tongue more elegantly in Gaelic? I asked if he would be at the Mòd in Oban next year. I only knew of this location because it is relevant in scheduling this year's ASSG conference. Almost a silly question; Alasdair said he had practically lived at mòds all his life! He also gave us a song after his talk to general acclaim.

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Neeltje Jans conference 2024 “Towards a future-proof shellfish culture”

Janet H Brown reports

Every time I have been to the Dutch Shellfish conference at Neeltje Jans I have wondered who is/was Neeltje Jans but after more futile enquiring this time I researched in more depth and discovered a publication in Water Science and Technology which explained that the name comes from prehistoric times. Neeltje Jans was the goddess of the sea, akin to Gaia for the earth. So no excuses for anyone not knowing all about Neeltje Jans by the time of the next conference.

Cornelis, A. The Philosophy of Neeltje Jans. Water Science and Technology Volume 31, Issue 8, 1995, Pages 9-17. And this is not the April Fool joke for this issue.

It was good to realise that in fact I had not missed any of the series of Dutch shellfish conferences since I realised that I had in fact been in Vlissingen for the first of the series. This was when the mussel producers held a day's conference as part of the International Conference on Shellfish Restoration (ICSR) meeting held in a giant cinema in Vlissingen back in 2007 but then strictly in Dutch language only.

Another long term question was answered on this latest visit and this does not reflect well on the narrator. This was a suggestion I made one year to the simultaneous interpreters, who do a great job. I thought it would be helpful to tell them that in every UK map of The Netherlands the Oosterschelde is featured and named as such. Therefore they did not need to translate it to the Eastern Schelde since we didn't know what the Schelde was. But now we know it is the River Schelde thanks to Dr Tim Regan.

Social media versus political advocacy

The conference was set out to tackle different topics tied in with future proofing, starting with shellfish as superfood, but one that may have some problems in selling. The pressing problem is how to get people to eat lower in the food chain and in this context particularly of shellfish. In the talk, “The fast food generation and the market for mussels; opportunities and challenges” Tilly Sintnicolaas and Dana Nijstad of the Dutch Mosselbureau, Yerseke addressed the difficulties that face the mussel industry in particular. The famous and unique Mussel Auction no longer exists but their organisation still has a responsibility for the mussel concerns. The growers now sell direct to the processors. The traditional demand for

live mussels is from people now in the senior age bracket. The “convenience generation” in 2030 will be more than 50% of the population. Mussels from Zeeland are mostly sold live. How to target this younger generation?

In the last issue of The Grower the report on the meeting at Fishmongers' Hall it had been suggested that what was lacking in trying to get people eating food lower in the food chain was “political advocacy”. The Dutch have a reputation for straight talking. Maybe to attract the younger generation a seafood burger could be the answer! That and good use of social media. This



Neeltje Jans conference 2024 cont.



Pictured above; a phalanx of waiters deliver the two superb oysters (pictured left) to the audience. What a great surprise starter for lunch.

Photo credit Tim Regan

was addressed in the first session “shellfish superfood” Unfortunately I didn’t get to taste one of the burgers but maybe the secret is – they are very good at social media. And with this directness and presumably good taste they were the prize winners in the sustainability awards that are an important part of this conference*. (see page 16 for the prize winner).

Just before lunch on the first day the opposite of shellfish as protein source – more as a gastronomic delight. Wouter Kik, the chef of Codium restaurant in Goes provided all the audience with 2 gourmet oysters. Just providing 2 shucked oysters each for this number of people was an ambitious task but see the photo (above) for what we were delighted with. The restaurant in Goes had been awarded a Michelin star and had bravely and generously offered to serve a gourmet oyster dish to everyone in the audience. (guide.michelin.com/en/zeeland/goes/restaurant/codium). And it was also something of a military operation to deliver them to the eager audience.

Gourmet oysters being served was one delightful novelty of the Dutch shellfish conference but there was more innovation to come; addressing shellfish farming as a career. This was a “round table” of three young men interviewed by Natalie Steins on the advantages of work in the shellfish industry. It wasn’t perhaps made explicit that there were problems getting people to work in the industry, but one very wise observer said to me afterwards that perhaps they were not thinking to find candidates in the other 50% of the population, not represented except by the very able female interviewer!

Pictured right, Nathalie Steins interviews young entrants to the shellfish business

Photocredit JHBrown

Other parts of the programme were more conventional but shellfish are shellfish so some problems and opportunities remain the same. It was very good to hear again about the research funded by Offshore Shellfish on the impact of their large offshore mussel farm. This time the presentation was given by the 2nd PhD student funded by them, Llucia Mascorda Cabre of Plymouth University. Take a look at their website which will give a much more valuable impression than anything I can provide here. sheehanresearchgroup.com/offshore-mussels/; offshoreshellfish.com/ These two website are well worth a look.

Previous accounts in The Grower of Neeltje Jans have referred to extreme cold. Glorious sunshine was another novelty this year, leading to some delegates actually taking a swim in the lunch break. This was probably more down to the delegates rather than any



Neeltje Jans conference 2024 cont.

exceptional weather - it was glorious sunshine but still cold.

The conference web site usefully also includes a report of the meeting and can be found at www.schelpdierconferentie.com/en/home which maybe useful in view of what I say alongside.



Pictured above, Tim Regan of the Roslin Institute, and Lucia Mascorda Cabre, University of Plymouth at Osterij. It had developed a great deal since I last visited and the museum provides a good background for the shellfish industry.



Photo credit JHBrown



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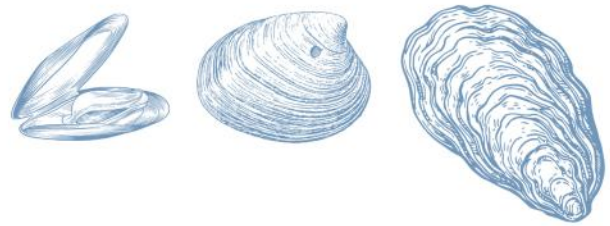
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Jekyll Island, Georgia, USA
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Since the first ICSR in 1996, this conference has been held worldwide, from Canada to Scotland, Australia, and beyond. Unique in approach, ICSR fosters lasting collaborations and friendships.

Jekyll Island, Georgia offers the ideal setting with its coastal beauty and natural resources. The Jekyll Island Convention Center features convenient spaces and ocean-view terraces. On-site events include a welcome reception, portable lunches, a traditional Low Country Boil, and an Inaugural Golf Tournament. Numerous hotels cater to all budgets, with Brunswick, Jacksonville, and Savannah airports nearby.

We welcome presentations on any topic related to the restoration or conservation of shellfish. We expect attendees from all aspects of restoration, including practitioners, researchers, indigenous, and other community leaders, and natural resources managers. We're eager to learn about your objectives and outcomes, from restoring populations to supporting responsible aquaculture.



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Aquaculture innovators wanted: join YAS and shape the future of aquaculture

Konstancja Woźniacka, Communications Officer at YAS

A new voice has emerged in the world of aquaculture - one that resonates with the vigour and passion of youth. The Young Aquaculture Society (YAS), a dynamic organization founded by young enthusiasts, is poised to redefine the landscape for professionals in the aquaculture sector.

Andrew's ¹ email landed in my inbox just as I was wrapping up work before my annual leave last summer. I almost missed it, but three words caught my attention: Young Aquaculture Society. Maybe not everyone will agree, but the aquaculture industry can sometimes feel isolating, especially for those of us working in remote areas. So seeing an email about a society that brings together young professionals still finding their footing in the dynamic world of aquaculture? I was hooked.

YAS was created by and for young professionals, in recognition of the need for connection between individuals working in the industry. Aquaculture ventures often dot remote coastlines, far from bustling urban centres. While the farms thrive in solitude, for those who tend to them the isolation can be a challenge. YAS forms a net, linking professionals across distances, and bridging the gap between industry and academia, providing a collaborative space for individuals to network, share insights, and develop key skills essential for success in the field.

Since our inception, YAS strives to be a catalyst for change. We firmly believe that the energy, innovation, and dedication of the younger generation will drive the industry towards a sustainable future. Through initiatives like the YAS Early Career Innovation Competition, we empower young innovators to tackle industry challenges and drive positive change. With each idea shared and solution proposed, we move closer to our vision of a thriving aquaculture sector. Future YAS events, webinars, and workshops, will allow our members to access valuable resources and opportunities, connect with industry leaders, exchange ideas, and stay informed about the latest developments in the field. We want our members to gain confidence and leadership skills that set them apart in the industry and put them in a position where they can positively influence the future of sustainable aquaculture. Whether you're knee-deep in oyster beds or navigating the complexities of aquaculture policy, YAS aims to equip you with the tools to thrive and propel your career forward.

Inclusivity is at the heart of everything we do and we welcome professionals from all corners of the aquaculture world. From farming, through research, to processing, we come together, united in our goal of creating a sustainable future for seafood farming. And if you are worried about your age, rest assured that at YAS, youth isn't defined by a number - it's a mindset! If you're passionate about driving innovation in UK aquaculture, you're young at heart in our book.

If you are not yet convinced that YAS is for you, think of the humble bivalve. The shellfish industry has always faced difficulties, and the recent years have been especially hard. Now more than ever it is important to promote the great work done by shellfish farmers and the positive impact the sector can have on local communities, the environment and as a sustainable protein source. Only with enough representation, can we

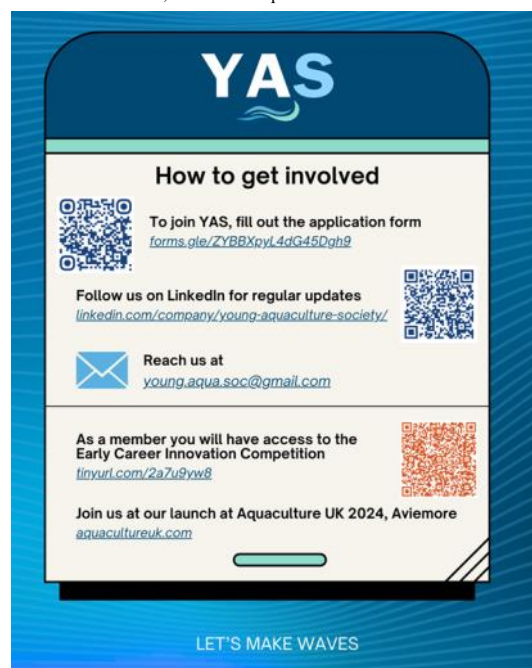


Konstancja's passion for the magnificent world of shellfish stems from her work at Seafish, where she investigates the nutrient removal ecosystem services of commercially important bivalves in the UK. Simultaneously, she is pursuing a biosciences PhD at the University of Exeter, researching aquaculture in Bangladesh. Currently, Konstancja serves as Communications Officer and Executive Committee member for the Young Aquaculture Society, spearheading engagement strategies and fostering collaboration within the community. Views expressed are the author's own.

make a difference. While finfish have conquered the hearts and plates of many, the shellfish sector awaits more champions to spotlight the beauty of bivalves and crustaceans as a nutritious food source. So if you are keen on amplifying the voice of shellfish aquaculture in the country, look no further. By joining YAS, you will gain more opportunities to promote the industry, advocate for more sustainable practices and promote the value of shellfish in the seafood industry.

As we embark on this journey, we invite you to join us - to be part of something bigger, something greater than ourselves. Whether you're a seasoned professional or a budding enthusiast, there's a place for you in our community. Together, we will cultivate a thriving ecosystem - one where the tides of innovation meet the beautiful aquaculture industry.

¹ Andrew Richardson, Founder and president of YAS



Modern apprenticeships in shellfish aquaculture

Further proof of the value of conferences! At Neeltje Jans I was pleased to meet with second generation mussel farmer, Sam Laurensen, son of Michael Laurensen of Blueshell Mussels. A couple of weeks later at the online AGM of the ASSG Sam heard me asking for articles of interest for readers of The Grower. He contacted me afterwards thinking others could benefit from hearing what he had found out and how useful it was being for him and his colleagues.

Sam had wanted to find out about training schemes or apprenticeships in aquaculture. He found out that there were such things but only knew of them being run in the salmon industry. He contacted UHI Shetland, Scalloway Campus, academic partner of University of Highlands and Islands (UHI) and learned that there was a course available but as far as shellfish were concerned it had only been run for limited shellfish farmers (mussels and oysters) due to low demand. What Sam was discovering for himself was the existence of the Modern Apprenticeship scheme. This has run for a number of years and the qualifications basis for them is the Modern Apprenticeship SVQs (Scottish Vocational Qualifications). These provide a vocational competency based training scheme specifically for people in employment.

Four young employees of Blueshell Mussels started in November 2023 and are benefiting from the training. Sam was clearly enjoying the course and took the time and trouble to pass the information on. Sam said, "The course is going well with a number of modules having been completed. Doing the apprenticeship requires very little additional time requirements using days tied up with weather to complete units. Everybody is progressing well and enjoying it." Sam is workboat skipper for Blueshell Mussels and pictured above right with one of the younger staff member of BSM who despite his name is no relation of Sam's! Shift differences made it too difficult to get a photo of all 4 modern apprentices together.

Skills Development Scotland provides the funding; this is for the training of the apprentice and as an apprentice has to have employed status, there is no financial support given directly to the employer. The scheme is run through Lantra who represents the industry. For more information see www.lantra.co.uk/careers/



Pictured above; Sam Laurensen and John-Andrew Laurensen outside UHI Shetland Scalloway Campus

At this time of year the prize winners for the ALBAS are announced. These are Lantra Scotland's awards for land based and aquaculture skills. Maybe future winners will be from the shellfish sector!

More details of the course can also be found at www.uhi.ac.uk/en/research-enterprise/res-themes/mese/aquaculture/education-training-skills/ or interested clients can have a chat to Aquaculture section leader Stuart Fitzsimmons or drop a mail to study.shetland@uhi.ac.uk

Many thanks also owed by JHB to Niall Evans of Lantra and Saro Saravanan of UHI Shetland for their help and input.

Aquaculture UK, 14-15 May, Aviemore

Aquaculture UK, which is free to attend, will be held at the Macdonald Resort in Aviemore, Scotland, from May 14-15, 2024. Show opening times are:

Tuesday, May 14, 9.30am-6pm (including social event);

Wednesday, May 15, 9.30am – 4pm.

To find out more about Aquaculture UK visit www.aquacultureuk.com.

For the full conference programme visit aquacultureuk.com/conference-programme/

Workshop assessing the decline of European mussel populations

Tim Regan, Roslin Institute, University of Edinburgh

Jildou Schotanus and Jacob Cappelle of IMARES, Wageningen took advantage of the Neeltje Jans conference to organise a mussel workshop ahead of it, looking at two aspects i) problems in recruitment which is a topic that is raised fairly frequently and ii) sudden mortality events that appear to be a new and as yet unexplained occurrence.

Tim Regan has kindly prepared this summary from the mortality discussion group.

The Mussel Mortality workshop held on 17-01-2024 in Neeltje Jans covered observations from scientists across Europe. There were several striking similarities in what was being reported across different countries, but no unifying cause of mortalities was revealed in any given place. While localised mortality events are noted in England, the East Coast of Scotland and Sweden, they are not as widespread as those in France and the Netherlands, where abnormal mass mortalities have been recurrent since 2014 and 2016, respectively. In Ireland, although there is no recorded increase in mortality, there has been a noticeable decline in mussel weight over the last decade, aligning with observations in Norway. Recruitment issues were also reported across Europe, but

appeared to be more localised and sporadic in any given country.

A recently characterised bacterial pathogen was also discussed, a specific strain of *Francisella haliotidica* associated with mass mortality events. High concentrations of this bacteria have been found in mussel tissues before and during mortality events in some areas of France and the Netherlands, although for now the consensus is that it is unclear whether it responsible for the mortalities or merely coinciding with them as an "opportunistic pathogen" i.e. a symptom of mussels dying for other unknown reasons. Researchers in France are leading efforts to characterise the virulence of this strain, although detecting this specific pathogenic strain is difficult as it is too similar to the non-pathogenic strains which are found in waters across Europe (including here in Scotland).

Overall, while mass mortality events appear most pressing in France and the Netherlands, the workshop underscored common challenges and emphasises the necessity for further investigation into the factors influencing mussel populations across Europe. A working group has been formed to explore these mortalities further, consolidate findings and share reports.



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Snippets

Shellfish Culture



This may be a bit of a stretch for the occasional “Shellfish culture” slot but certainly food is part of culture, but are chocolate oysters a help or a hindrance as far as encouraging people to eat healthily and also to eat lower down the food chain? I like to think the more we familiarise the oyster or mussels the more likely people are to try eating them. This product above was supposed to be part of Marks and Spencer’s Valentine’s special but this was certainly being marketed in Stirling in time for Mothering Sunday.

But undoubtedly the prize winner from the Neeltje Jans conference reported alongside has a far better idea and examples of his products, plus others, can be seen on page 9.

Shellfish innovation award (Dutch)



Dutch entrepreneur and artist Rem van den Bosch (*above right*) being interviewed by Jo Annes de Bat having won the innovation award for his sea based food innovation. His company, Superfood Zeeland developed various items including mussel burger and mussel bites. This may be the way to get the younger generation into eating shellfish. 7 new products were developed as part of this innovation. See their website at www.mosselburger.nl/

Stranraer Oyster Festival

Plans for Stranraer Oyster Festival 2024 are well under way. Taking place on 13-15 September, with a pre-event Big Oyster Bash on Saturday 7 September, the festival is now in its sixth year and draws thousands of people to the scenic town of Stranraer each year. For its 2024 iteration Stranraer Oyster Festival is focusing on flavour and local provenance. Ticket sales open in April.

While the festival will once again celebrate the wild, native oysters of Loch Ryan, organisers are planning to incorporate an increased emphasis in other seafood from the Galloway coastline, celebrating the wider flavours of south west Scotland. The festival has also invested in improved infrastructure, increasing the capacity of the

marquee that hosts the oyster bar by 25% to accommodate growing visitor numbers.

Romano Petrucci, Chairman of Stranraer Development Trust, the community organisation that runs the festival, said:

“For me this year’s festival is going to have a really strong focus on quality. This year we’re going all out on the ‘better’ to make sure visitors to our town have an exceptional festival experience enjoying the very best of local seafood with Loch Ryan Oysters at the very heart of the event.”

For more information about Stranraer Oyster Festival visit www.stranraeroysterfestival.com
