**News release**

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**Investigation begins into Europe’s flat-lining aquaculture industry**

Oban, Scotland:

As Europe’s reliance on seafood imports increases, a team of marine scientists has embarked on a three-year project to investigate why the continent’s own aquaculture industry is flat-lining, while countries outside the European Union (EU) enjoy boom time in the sector.

The AquaSpace project, led by Professor Kenny Black of the Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS), brings together a global team of experts on aquaculture in the environment.

The team will look at case studies across the world to find out how the EU can kick-start the industry to create more jobs and make the continent more self-sufficient. The scientists will also consider what impact planning and public perception has on the industry.

“As the world population grows, we will have huge issues regarding food security. Aquaculture, if managed in a sustainable way, could be part of the solution,” said Professor Black, University of the Highlands and Islands Professor of Aquaculture and Environment Interactions.

“We aim to find out how we can make space for sustainable aquaculture and use Marine Spatial Planning to increase food security and employment opportunities through economic growth.

“We will also look at how society views aquaculture, whether their fears are justified or not and whether this creates uncertainty for farmers looking to start up a business.”

The aquaculture industry within the EU has failed to grow in recent years, while countries outwith the EU, including other European countries like Norway, have expanded theirs. In China alone, the industry was worth more than $66 billion in 2012 and it continues to grow year on year. Europe produces around 2 per cent of the world’s aquaculture and imports 80 per cent of all its aquatic produce.

By 2020, the Scottish Government aims to increase finfish production sustainably to 210,000 tonnes (the 2013 figure was 165,256 tonnes) and shellfish production to 13,000 tonnes (6,757 tonnes in 2013).

Minister for the Environment Aileen McLeod said: “The Scottish Government is committed to the sustainable development of the aquaculture sector in Scottish waters, and wishes to see expansion in the most environmentally suitable locations. Therefore we welcome this new project and hope that the innovative approaches employed will provide guidance to help Scottish aquaculture develop sustainably.”

AquaSpace member Professor Jon Grant, from the Department of Oceanography, Dalhousie University, Nova Scotia, said: “We already know that into the future there will not be enough land to grow all the crops we need to feed the planet. Fisheries have a huge variety of problems through being over exploited, so aquaculture is one sensible way to be able to farm the seas.”

Dr Øivind Bergh, from the Institute of Marine Research, Norway, is also on the AquaSpace team. He said: “The coastline has lots of different uses: tourism, people want to live there, energy production and so on. Most of these sectors are more mighty than the aquaculture industry, so if Europe wants to develop aquaculture and become more self-sustaining regarding fish production we have to address these problems and utilise space in a smarter way.”

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**Notes to editors**

AquaSpace is one of the first projects funded by the EU’s Horizon 2020 programme.

The Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS) is Scotland’s largest and oldest independent marine science organisation, dedicated to delivering marine science for a healthy and sustainable marine environment through research, education and engagement with society.

Based near Oban on the Scottish west coast, SAMS research strengths include marine renewables, aquaculture, marine biotechnology, marine policy, deep-sea systems, environmental change and polar science.

SAMS is a founding partner of the University of the Highlands and Islands, delivers national capability and ocean observation for the UK’s Natural Environment Research Council and is an associated institution of the United Nations University.