

Small to medium enterprises (SMEs) in the aquaculture sector in the Highlands and Islands are being reminded of the £1m Accelerated Aquaculture Innovation (AAI) fund.

The fund is currently being piloted by Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) and the Scottish Aquaculture Innovation Centre (SAIC) to boost innovation in the industry supply chain.

One of the first recipients is a project by Ferguson Transport & Shipping with their head office based at Corpach, who devised a new method for the efficient removal of fish mortalities from farms.

The project has been awarded £181,000 by the innovation fund. If successful, it could significantly reduce the impacts on fish farm operations.

Aquaculture is a priority sector for HIE and of growing importance to Scotland's economy. Elaine Jamieson, HIE's head of food and drink, said:

“Scotland's aquaculture industry is forecast to grow substantially in the years ahead. Innovation will underpin sustainable growth and maintain the global competitiveness of Scotland's products and services.

“This innovation programme is about helping SMEs across the supply chain achieve greater commercialisation of new products and services that will have a positive economic and social impact.

“We very much look forward to seeing the Ferguson project develop, and would urge those involved in other aquaculture related innovation projects with clear commercial outcomes to consider applying to the fund.”

Projects from £25,000 to £1 million will be considered. Where applications are successful, the AAI programme could typically

provide up to half the project cost. Where applications don't quite meet the programme criteria, the AAI team will point SMEs to more suitable support avenues so that they still receive the help they need to develop their concept

More information on the AAI programme is available at <http://scottishaquaculture.com/work-with-us/accelerating-aquaculture-innovation-programme/>

Jack Ferguson, operational director with Ferguson Transport & Shipping, said:

“We are delighted to have received the support from the Aquaculture Innovation Fund. This funding will assist us in bringing to fruition our ideas and our innovative design, for specific mechanical handling, into modular bulk transport tanks, to transport and deliver fish mortalities in a safer and strict bio secure way. Our new method will allow us to collect directly from the pens and thereafter deliver direct for the reprocessing for energy, from waste or processing into liquid fertiliser.”