Our responses and list of changes are detailed below. All line numbers refer to the track changes PDF.

REVIEWER REPORTS:  
  
**Referee: 1**This study conducts stakeholder interviews in Scotland to gather diverse perspectives on farmed salmon and examines its supply, composition, price, and nutrient content using secondary survey data. This topic is interesting, but I have several main concerns.

**R:** Thank you for this comment, and we are pleased to hear your interest in the interview insights. We have addressed your concerns point-by-point below.  
  
 My main concern is that this study is based on stakeholder interviews, yet the results and discussion sections do not sufficiently reflect findings from these interviews. Instead, much of the description is derived from secondary data on the farmed salmon industry, including its supply, composition, price, and nutrient content (Figs. 1-4). Notably, the result section reads more like a background summary of the global and UK farmed salmon industry rather than an analysis of primary data. This section heavily relies on peer studies, which would be more appropriately placed in the introduction or discussion. To enhance clarity and alignment with the study’s objectives, I recommend restructuring this section to emphasize interview-based findings. The validated figures (Figs. 1-4) should serve as supplementary information rather than the focal point. Additionally, incorporating more quantitative analysis of the interview data and presenting the findings through visualized figures or tables would enhance readability and ensure that the primary data remains central to the discussion.

## **R:** Thank you for this suggestion. We have restructured and expanded our Results to include more on the key insights from the interviews, ordered by themes in Table 1, and interspersed with insights from secondary data analysis.

## Our methodological approach was to pair qualitative interviews with quantitative data, with the goal of achieving data saturation in a small number of expert interviews. It is not appropriate to apply quantitative analysis to this small sample, but rather we followed established qualitative methods to extract major themes across expert answers. For example, each theme in Table 1 was mentioned at least once by all eight interviewees, except for fish welfare (7/8), convenience (7/8), future challenges (6/8), and retail power (5/8), demonstrating data saturation. We have added these details to Table 1 caption and, in our revised results structure, we now note when all interviewees raised topics.

## In our Methods, we also now acknowledge that we interviewed eight expert stakeholders with the goal of identifying key factors underlying the rise of the UK farmed salmon market. This approach aims to sample a diversity of experienced stakeholders, in order to reveal dominant but contrasting perspectives on this topic. We now note that our 8 interviews prioritised depth of data, using thematic saturation to guide our findings, rather than word counting (Easterby-Smith et al. 2015) (L658-664). This enabled us to then conduct new analysis of secondary datasets to test stakeholder perceptions. Together, these approaches enabled us to conduct a ‘marketography’ (L647) of UK farmed salmon.

The methodology section needs to be restructured to improve its logical flow. The primary focus should be on the originality of the approach, emphasizing stakeholder interviews rather than validation through secondary data. To achieve this, I suggest reorganizing the methodology into two main subsections, first, stakeholder interviews - this subsection should outline more information about the interview process, including participant selection, data collection methods, and key themes identified. Second, validation approach - this subsection should describe how secondary data sources, such as UK farmed salmon production, UK aquatic food consumption, and market-making datasets, were used to support and contextualize the interview findings. A clearer logical progression could be the authors first conducted stakeholder interviews to identify key themes related to Scottish farmed salmon. Then, based on these identified topics, they validated the findings by identifying relevant data from sources such as FAO and survey datasets. This approach ensures that the interviews remain central to the study while using secondary data as a supplementary tool for validation.

## **R:** Thank you for your helpful suggestion. We agree this structure is helpful and more logical. In our revised manuscript, we have restructured the Methods section, with new (expanded) interview methods followed by the validation approach (“*Datasets on UK farmed salmon and aquatic foods”*) (L686). Minor comments: - The main findings in the abstract should focus more on insights from the interviews, rather than summarizing existing evidence from secondary data.

## **R:** We have revised the abstract to include an additional sentence on insights from interviews: “*Interviewees identified retailer behaviours, such as labelling, and consume-facing promotion efforts, such as health benefits, as key demand-growth factors underlying farmed salmon sales.*” (L13).

- The original data used in Fig. 1-4 are secondary data captured from international databases, surveys or reports. These visualizations summarize existing evidence, but no additional analysis has been conducted by the authors. Here, each figure should include citations to indicate their data sources.

## **R:** We have added data citations to all figure captions.

- Line 101-103: Specify the number of interviewees from each category, i.e., aquaculture researchers, industry leaders, and policymakers, to provide clearer context on the composition of the stakeholder group.

## **R:** We now specify interviewees per each category (L106).

- Line 166- 341: The results section should primarily focus on findings from the interviews and their validation using secondary data. Citations from peer studies should be relocated to the introduction or discussion or removed if not directly relevant to the findings.

## **R:** We have moved any contextual or interpretation sentences to the Discussion. In our revised manuscript, the only citations in Results are the data sources and two papers that specifically examined Scottish salmon production (Ellis et al. 2016, Willer et al. 2023).

- Line 167: The section titled Results: Scottish Salmon Context primarily presents secondary data, making it more suitable as background information. Consider restructuring this section to prioritize interview findings (e.g., under the topic Industry) and integrate relevant farmed salmon trends to provide context and support for these insights.

## **R:** Thank you for this suggestion. We have revised our results to start with interview findings, and integrate data on Scottish salmon context within these paragraphs. Our results are now structured by summarising each of the four key themes, with additional quotes to support each topic keyword. These perspectives are complemented with our analysis of secondary data, which we use to support or contrast each interviewee viewpoint.

- Line 242: Table 1 is well-structured. The authors could consider reorganizing the results section using the topics Industry, Retailers, Diets, and Environment for better clarity and coherence. Additionally, it would be valuable to indicate the number of interviewees who highlighted each topic, providing a clearer sense of the key themes’ prevalence.

## **R:** Thank you for this suggestion. We have restructured our results section using the topics in Table 1, allowing us to directly contrast the importance of each topic. We have also noted the number of interviewees who highlighted each topic in the caption of Table 1. In accordance with our approach (thematic analysis of expert actors), we identified ten topics that were mentioned frequently and by most or all interviewees, and used only these topics as a basis for our secondary analysis.

- The discussion is fine but could include study implications to highlight how the findings apply to the farmed salmon industry.

**R:** Many thanks for this comment. Our study sheds light on the power of market-making efforts in organising salmon markets, and co-creating demand for salmon products. Our discussion explains that this is led by industry, which would be expected to aim to maximise its profits, create a favourable regulatory environment, and dominate aquatic food sector. As such, our implications are concerned with impacts arising from industry, including 1) potential negative impact on consumer diets, 2) misleading labelling and sustainability issues, and 3) regulatory opportunities for other aquatic foods.

- Supplementary Table 1 presents the themes developed by the stakeholders and is well-documented. It would be helpful to summarize the main points and include more quantitative findings, such as the frequency of topics and linkages between them. These insights could be integrated into the main results section for better clarity.

**R:** Thank you for pointing out that the methodology employed needs more clarity. We did not use quantitative methods for interview content analysis, but a qualitative method that aims to sample a small number of expert actors to achieve thematic saturation in answers. This means that we only discuss themes that were mentioned by all or most of the interviewees, and use transcripts to compare and contrast perspectives on these themes. We have now clarified our methodology and expanded our interview findings throughout the Results.

**Referee: 2** Thank you for the opportunity to read and review your manuscript. My expertise lies in fisheries management and aquaculture production. I have some experience in the marketing of products from these industries, but not enough to feel confident that I have completed an exhaustive review.  
  
 I have been involved in economic analyses of these industries and have had to make do with FAO and country databases in the past, which I have found to be unreliable for fine scale analysis. I think using multiple data sets and backing them up with industry stakeholder interviews goes some way to alleviate this concern, but this raises further concerns, too. If I understand correctly, a qualitative analysis of only eight industry members was undertaken, ranging across "activists, aquaculture researchers, industry leaders, and policymakers". It would have been interesting to know if the opinions of the respondents representing the above classes were different, or similar. Also, I found some of the comments reported in the supplementary material to be interesting and perhaps even significant but not mentioned in the analysis.

## **R:** Thank you for the support for our approach of combining existing datasets with stakeholder interviews. We have restructured our Results section to better bring out comparisons between stakeholders and data, and expanded the text to explain when participants agreed (or not) with these perceptions. For example, “All interviewees identified salmon health benefits” (L407), and contrasting sustainability perspectives (L434-469). We have not named interviewees or linked statements to the interviewee background, as this would risk breaking confidentiality (e.g. we interviewed one activist).

## Without access to their background, I must assume that the authors are from the UK or are well versed in the UK/European market, where farmed salmon products are ubiquitous. It seems that their analysis misses one of the key market drivers; farmed salmon has intrinsic value as a very desirable food product. As an outsider looking in, farmed Norwegian salmon is a simply unaffordable premium product in my country, priced at least 3-4 times higher than other available fish species. Scottish salmon is probably worth more, if it were available here. It would be interesting to know if salmon has maintained its value as it has slowly replaced other aquatic products in the UK diet... in other words has the growth in production resulted from desirability or affordability?

## **R:** Thanks for this interesting insight - the change in affordability over time was also of interest, but we failed to find data on this. Our analysis suggests that desirability has been co-created by industry and retailers (through labelling, convenience), and that this has resulted in an increase in salmon consumption by the wealthiest consumers, which drives overall aquatic food sector consumption. We have now added this perspective to our discussion (“*the availability of more affordable aquatic foods may have decreased in response to salmon market-making”*, L499).

## All in all, a thought provoking, but somewhat frustrating article. **Referee: 3** I was asked to judge on how to proceed with this article as there are conflicting recommendations from two reviewers (accept vs. major revisions/resubmission). Hence, I have read the paper and the review reports and provide some recommendation in the following, however not providing a full additional review report.

I agree with both reviewers that this is an interesting article that in principle deserves publication. I also agree with reviewer 1 that the methods section could be strengthened, i.e. the authors should take up the recommendations of the first reviewer made in the second larger paragraph of the report starting with “The methodology section needs to be restructured…”; also the smaller points raised should be addressed.

## **R:** Thank you for your positive assessment of our study. We have addressed reviewer 1’s suggestion to restructure the Methods section, and added detail on interview sample size and justification for our qualitative approach (L661). We have also addressed all reviewer 1’s smaller points, which have greatly improved the insights from our manuscript.

Regarding the first major point of reviewer 1, I see this less critical, as in the first part of the results, the interview results are rather prominent, while admittedly, later the secondary literature is in the focus. With the changes and additional information added to the methods section mentioned above, this point can well be addressed. Thereby, please consider the suggestions made by the reviewer to further strengthen the role of the interview results in the results presentation.

## **R:** Thank you for your support of our double approach, using interviews and secondary datasets to inspect market making in farmed salmon. We have now strengthened the interview results by restructuring the analysis according to the key themes and codes found in the interview analysis (Table 1). In these sections, we now present interview insights and contrast with secondary data, thus balancing primary and secondary data findings.

Finally, one minor point:  
 Page 11, line 337: “misleading consumers (Jacquet et al 2010).” – would be good to have a newer reference for this, as this can have changed much over the past 15 years….

## **R:** Thank you for this suggestion. We have reviewed the recent literature and decided to remove this detail, focusing our point on what is known about ecolabels failing to capture broader aspects of salmon production.