

**PE1782/A**

Scottish Government submission of 9 April 2020

Thank you for your letter of 10 March 2020 addressed to Iain Jaynes, setting out the Public Petitions Committee's initial consideration of the above petition, on the subject of stocking of salmon rivers, and seeking our comments on this.

By way of background it may be helpful to the Committee to know that a revised policy on salmon stocking was published in May 2019. This responded to some concerns in the previous few months over the application of the existing policy. These events resulted in the acceleration of the planned review of Marine Scotland's stocking policy in order to avoid similar issues arising in the future. At the time, therefore, we considered it necessary to revisit the policy and the criteria by which applications to take broodstock or to stock rivers would be considered, as a matter of some urgency. This reflected, amongst other things, the concerns of Ministers and the Parliament with regard to the declining conservation status of Atlantic salmon, and pressures from some parts of the wild fisheries sector to resolve the position on stocking quickly.

The May 2019 policy was developed following discussions with a number of major stakeholders in the wild fisheries sector and elsewhere. Those consulted at the time included Fisheries Management Scotland (FMS), Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), as well as the Scottish Salmon Producers Organisation (SSPO) and Salmon and Trout Conservation Scotland (STCS). In addition, we spoke with and took input from representatives of a number of District Salmon Fisheries Boards and River Trusts around Scotland. This included those with responsibility for a number of significant salmon rivers in Scotland including the Lochaber, Spey and Tay river catchments.

Having introduced the new policy in May 2019, we committed to Ministers and to stakeholders that we would continue to keep the position under review, continue discussions with stakeholders and monitor the impact of the revised policy as it was applied in 2019. Our aim has been to use the information gained to review and revisit the policy to see if it is fit for purpose, or whether further changes are needed to allow stocking where this is appropriate, whilst continuing to protect our precious Atlantic salmon. In this regard, we are conscious that the policy has raised concerns amongst a number of people in the angling community, and some of those who own and manage salmon fisheries.

Over recent weeks, Marine Scotland has been assessing that impact and gathering the latest research and evidence on stocking of salmon and we will be examining all of this in the near future. Our intention then is to set out any further proposals in a short, focused consultation involving the wider public.

We are not, at this stage, clear about the dates and the exact form of the consultation as these may be dictated to some extent by the need to address the Covid-19 emergency as a matter of priority. However, we are hopeful that we can continue to make progress on this issue with a view to consulting this coming summer.