

Rob Gibson MSP  
Convener  
Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee  
The Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh  
EH99 1SP

23 February 2016

Dear Rob,

## **SALMON CONSERVATION REGULATIONS**

Earlier today the Conservation of Salmon (Scotland) Regulations 2016 and corresponding Tweed Order were laid in the Scottish Parliament following over 12 months of continuing stakeholder consultation and engagement.

I appreciate that the delay in bringing these forward has been of concern to the Committee and to stakeholders more widely, and I apologise that this has been the case. However in mitigation I would want to reassure you that this reflects my continued desire to work with the sector to address remaining questions and apprehensions that some have had about the process and the basis for moving forward.

You will recall that in my letter of 19 January I outlined in more detail some of the key reasons for the conservation regulations and the challenges that these present. You will recall there are a number of key aspects to the proposals:

- Killing outwith estuary limits will be prohibited for three years due to the mixed stock nature of the fishery and limited data on the composition of the catch
- The killing of Atlantic salmon in inland waters will be managed on an annual basis by categorising fishery districts by their conservation status
- Requirement for a Conservation Plan irrespective of the conservation status

It has been clear that one of the major concerns for some angling clubs who operate within a Fishery District assigned as a category 3 – mandatory catch and release – has been the concerns around the perceived impact on their membership and the risks that some clubs may be unable to subsume any subsequent drop in revenue.

To help alleviate these concerns I have also chosen today to announce that I will be allocating £100,000 over two years to assist those angling clubs who consider that they might be negatively affected by the new rules to promote the benefits of catch and release.

More details will be forthcoming over the next few weeks. Alongside the financial assistance work will commence to ascertain the trends in current angling club membership and to begin to measure these alongside a number of factors, including declining salmon stocks, voluntary and statutory catch and release, and costs; and to allow us to better understand the issues facing the sector.

In early April, a template for the Conservation Plan referenced in the Regulations will be circulated. The Conservation Plan is a key component of the conservation measures and provides an opportunity to begin to understand the key factors from a local and national perspective that may be influencing the categorisation status of our Fishery Districts. This would provide a further evidential mechanism through which to prioritise key science and policy initiatives going forward. Officials will soon be discussing the template with a number of fishery trust biologists before any formal introduction. It is anticipated that these would be completed within three months of the Regulations coming into force.

Finally, I wanted to restate my commitment to working with the sector going forward. My officials will soon be organising a half day event for stakeholders. This will provide a further opportunity to explain in more detail the policy and science, the support package I outlined earlier and to reaffirm the importance of the conservation plan.

I hope the Committee understands the reason for the delay in bringing these Regulations forward and that while we remain of the view that our approach is both robust and comparable with many other countries we are neither complacent or unreceptive to improving the methodology going forward.

I would be happy to meet with you to talk through the background and to answer any questions that you might have.

I am copying this letter to the Convener of the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee.

*With kind regards*

*Aileen*

**AILEEN MCLEOD**