



Agenda Item 6.2
For Information

Council

CNL(14)50

Management approach to salmon fisheries in Scotland

(Tabled by EU-UK (Scotland))

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(*SPEAKING NOTES TO ACCOMPANY PRESENTATION*)

Objective of session

Under the ‘Action Plan’ it is stated that the focus of the first Theme-based Special Session should be on mixed-stock fisheries, with the opportunity for an exchange of information on fisheries exploiting stocks that are below their CLs and on the interplay between socio-economic considerations, including the interests of indigenous people, and conservation needs.

The objectives of the Theme-based Special Session are to allow for a more detailed exchange of information on the management of salmon fisheries including:

- Progress in establishing conservation limits, or alternative reference points, and the approaches being used to manage fisheries in their absence;
- How management measures are used to ensure the protection of the weakest contributing stocks in mixed-stock fisheries;
- How socio-economic considerations, including the interests of indigenous people, are weighed against conservation needs and, where fishing is permitted on stocks below their CLs, the approaches being used to ensure that exploitation is limited to a level that permits stock rebuilding within a stated timeframe.

Scene-setting

NASCO 2014, and the opportunity to make a presentation on the management approach to salmon fisheries in Scotland, is indeed timely.

Since March of this year and indeed during the passage of the Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2013 much of the focus in Scotland has been about looking towards the future, culminating with the recently announced (March 2014) wild fisheries review - .

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/marine/Salmon-Trout-Coarse/fishreview>

That review, which critically is independent of the Scottish Government, has been tasked to:

‘Identify a modern, evidence-based management system for wild fisheries fit for purpose in the 21st century, and one that is capable of responding to the changing environment.’

What does that mean?

At the heart of an effective management system is its governance structure (the central coordinating mechanism). This needs to be able to provide strategic leadership, direction and monitor progress in a manner that links clearly to the outcomes sought. To work towards that goal, the Chair of the review has asked for views and thoughts on the kind of governance structure that our stakeholders believe might best achieve this, including how best to ensure a direct line of sight back to Scottish Ministers and the national public interest.

Key to that thinking will also be the Scottish Government's commitment to manage, conserve and develop its wild fisheries to maximise the sustainable benefit of Scotland's wild fish resources to the country as a whole and particularly to rural areas.

Reconciling current thinking with determining what structure we need to move forward has proven to be very challenging, both for our stakeholders and the various component parts within Scottish Government. There are many entrenched views and there is significant history, distrust and disappointment.

While the review is still very much in its infancy, the nature and speed of public and political expectations being what they are, means it will be required to grow up very quickly indeed. Patience is not necessarily considered a virtue by some in the sector.

Our stakeholders are watching intently as the various review events, involving the many stakeholders, take place nationwide and discuss both the bigger picture, the relationship between accountability and responsibility both at a local and national perspective, and the challenges of the current fiscal environment which are particular to all sectors.

The fact that the review panel has duration of around six months with the clock ticking rapidly outlines the importance given to the task in hand by the Scottish Government.

International Obligations including NASCO

On the review table will be some analysis on both domestic and international obligations, ranging from European Union and global biodiversity targets and the ambitious and challenging water framework directive designed to prevent deterioration in ecological quality and where necessary to improve the quality of our rivers, lochs, estuaries, coastal waters and groundwater.

Moreover, the Panel will be very conscious of and alive to the obligations placed on member states by NASCO, and the principle of international cooperation to ensure that Atlantic salmon is protected during its marine phase. As part of that discussion, the guidelines for Management of Salmon Fisheries which NASCO consider member states should have in

place or work towards in order to protect abundance and diversity of salmon stocks, will be of clear interest.

Scotland is clearly signed up to NASCO.

With that background in mind, and in recognition of the potential for change in the legislative basis for the management of wild fisheries, I have approached this presentation in the spirit for which it planned – namely, a discussion on the current management approach to salmon fisheries in Scotland but with an eye on important socio economic considerations.

The starting point for any discussion for Scotland must be on the Scottish Government's focus on creating a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth.

Underneath that fundamental principle is the protection and promotion of sustainable Scottish salmon and freshwater fisheries. And within that the desirability of evidence –based decision making, of which science is clearly a key component part - but certainly not in isolation from other priorities –, and the wider social, economic and political strands of policy making. In essence, it is not a straight forward equation and sometimes produces a multitude of applicable layers and answers.

Economics

Let's look at the economic picture.

Salmon and freshwater fisheries contribute over £120m to the Scottish economy and support around 3,000 jobs, mainly in fragile rural communities whilst providing a basis for sustainable rural tourism. Those statistics are somewhat dated – from 2004 although we will update these through research being commissioned this year – but they provide an indication of value even if one to simply look to maintain the status quo.

Scotland's freshwater fish populations and communities are of international natural heritage value and of global renown.

Key drivers within the policy making arena include environmental issues (the protection of natural resources, protecting and improving the habitat and bio-security), resources (sustainable fisheries and the monitoring of fish stocks), contingency (how would we handle a disease outbreak), and the wider social (inclusion) agenda (community involvement, tourism and the needs of the user).

Progress towards Conservation Limits

In agreeing to make this presentation, I acknowledge that Scotland has yet to establish meaningful conservation limits - there are only 3 sites on 2 of Scotland's 398 identified salmon rivers where catch data is available to establish stock-recruitment relationships from which CL'S can be derived - but that equally we are making great strides to reach that goal.

As outlined in our Implementation Plan, Scotland is **actively** working towards the development of meaningful conservation limits and spawning escapement estimates so that salmon stocks can be more accurately assessed according to the NASCO guidelines, in order that appropriate management decisions can be taken.

What does that look like in practice? Well, a number of developments have taken place and a number of initiatives are in train with a view to moving us forward enough that we are confident in making that next step.

In practice these amount to:

A current tender programme to identify the right body to undertake a technical, logistical and economic consideration for the development and implementation of a Scottish Salmon Counter network. This work is a critical phase of our work towards establishing meaningful conservation levels.

Forward planning in recognition of the significant financial and resource investment required to accompany this work.

Consideration of how we might be able to accelerate our thinking in parallel with the work around counters and the considerations of the review. This will include some analysis of existing data sources and how these might be applied. For example we know stock assessment is informed by a number of sources of scientifically useful information including rod catches, counters, fixed traps and juvenile surveys. These data sources clearly have different strengths and weaknesses and I am sure the science colleagues in the room would be able to say more than I about their individual strengths and weaknesses.

Equally I am sure we would agree that fisheries management decisions should be taken according to the best available science and evidence.

Action in the absence of conservation limits

Our Implementation Plan accurately reflects that District Salmon Fishery Boards (as the statutory managers) make determinations on the need for exploitation reduction based on a Decision Flow Chart Based on Rod Catch as an Abundance Indicator as well as and in addition to other locally available data (e.g. juvenile densities).

Should a need for measures be evidenced DSFBs they are encouraged to agree voluntary measures with all relevant parties. Examples include catch and release and potential compensation for cessation of netting.

District Salmon Fishery Boards may also make applications for statutory conservation measures to Scottish Ministers

While District Salmon Fishery Boards are the recognised statutory managers of salmon fisheries, Scottish Ministers now have a set of fisheries management backstop powers which they can exercise in the event of local management failure or to tackle national issues.

In addition to the ability to make conservation measures at their own hand, Ministers (having sought advice from scientific advisors) can alter the weekly close time and carry out investigations into particular fisheries.

The Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2013 which I mentioned earlier and which we talk about in greater detail within the Implementation Plan provides additional powers for Ministers to carry out sampling, make annual close time orders and require information from salmon fishery proprietors.

Indeed we are about to go to our Minister's detailing the extent to which the District Salmon Fishery Boards are meeting their obligations – both as a minimum and in some cases beyond – and the action we may need to take to ensure full compliance within the first year of the legislation come into force.

River Esk Project

Ministers are currently carrying out a 3 year investigation into perceived problems with the spring salmon in the River South Esk; this investigation has included genetic sampling of the net fishery and radio tagging of fish to identify spawning locations.

The project was commenced following an application for conservation measures by the local Board and aims to gather additional information on the nature of the problem in order to inform suitable management action. For the duration of the project, voluntary agreement to postpone the start of the netting season and implement catch and release in the rod fishery has been agreed between the Board and the proprietors

My colleague, Julian Maclean, we say a lot more about this project this afternoon.

Salmon Stock Assessment paper

It is also worth noting that Marine Scotland Science recently produced and published a report presenting a simple summary and interpretation of the various data collected by Scottish Government regarding adult salmon abundance to provide an overview of the current status of Scottish stocks.

Available information suggests that the overall number of Atlantic salmon returning to Scottish rivers has increased over recent years. However, there is variation in trends of abundance among components of the stock associated with particular regions and run times. In particular, spring-running salmon remain at low levels and we recognise are worthy of particular management consideration.

Our intention will be to update this report when our catch statistics are published in April next year. This will provide our ministers, NASCO and the public with an up to date interpretation of the status of Scottish salmon stocks.

I think that is probably enough from me. I would welcome any comments from colleagues about our work going forward.