

## **Wild Fisheries Review**

### **MONTHLY BULLETIN FOR JULY 2014**

Welcome to the fifth progress bulletin to be issued by the panel appointed by the Minister for Environment and Climate Change to conduct an independent review of the wild fisheries management system in Scotland.

Thank you to those who are still sending in written contributions to the review. Meetings with a range of stakeholders are also continuing, in some cases for the second or even third time. All of this input helps to ensure that the review is able to “road test” its thinking as it develops, for which many thanks.

The panel met with its advisers on 21 July to give further consideration to a large number of detailed workstreams, and on the basis of this has now started work on drafting sections of report to the Minister. The panel will meet again on 18 August to discuss this in more depth.

The panel’s thinking on local Fisheries Management Organisations (FMOs) has now begun to crystallise, and is moving on to issues of detail. What should a model constitution for an FMO look like? What might the core requirements of “approved body status” be? What should be covered by a Local Fisheries Management Plan? What happens in an area of the country if there is no local interest in forming an effective FMO?

Similarly there is now a degree of clarity around the main features of the national Wild Fisheries Unit (WFU), but still some unanswered questions. What should be put in place in terms of statutory duties and powers in order to ensure that the WFU can be fully effective? What might the head of the WFU be called? What will a National Wild Fisheries Strategy contain, and who is it expected to influence?

Given the panel’s wish to design a system that will remain fit for purpose for many years to come, a fair bit of crystal ball gazing is now important and inevitable. There is no shortage of detailed and short term material demanding our consideration, but we must first ensure that we have the big picture framework right.

Funding remains a challenging issue. The existing levy system works fairly well, but it does not draw resources from non-salmon fisheries, and it has produced variable outcomes in different areas of the country. How might it be improved without losing its fundamental strengths in the process? Might there be merit in following some of the thinking of the Land Reform Review Group as set out in its recent report?

The question of whether to recommend introduction of a rod licence continues to occupy the panel. Views expressed by stakeholders are polarised, and it is clear that there might be significant resistance unless a licence conveys real benefits on the holder. The panel’s rough calculations suggest that the income from a rod licence could be considerable, and would allow many things to be done that stakeholders are calling for. So what is it that people really want? Life offers few free lunches.

The panel and its advisers continue to explore two linked aspects of the review’s terms of reference. What information and skill sets will be required in order to deliver a truly evidence based management system, and how will these be secured and maintained? The decentralised management system envisaged by the panel inevitably makes a coherent and consistent approach to

these issues more challenging, and the inherent tension between control and empowerment will require careful and sensitive management on all sides.

The panel's outline proposals for a quota system to control the killing of species (notably salmon) under potential conservation threat have been well received by most stakeholders. Key elements of the proposals are now fairly clear, but there remains a need for clarity about how quotas might be set in practice, the scientific basis for doing so, and the extent to which this should be precautionary. The central issue, at least in relation to salmon, is the degree to which the killing of fish may have an impact on spawning and recruitment, and we intend to think further about this over the next few weeks.

A key message to emerge from recent stakeholder meetings, especially on the west coast, is for the panel to consider how the protection order system might be redesigned in order to improve its effectiveness. What is the public interest purpose of the system? Is the current designation process perhaps too cumbersome? Should the criteria for designation be revisited? Might there be merit in a time limited designation, with provision for reapplication and review (say) every five years?

Feedback on ways in which the current bailiff system might be improved also continues to be fed in by stakeholders. Should private estates and individuals be able to employ bailiffs? How can we ensure proper public accountability for the exercise of their powers, while at the same ensuring local responsiveness? Might there be a case for different categories of bailiff?

Two new topics occupied the latter stages of the panel's meeting on 21 July. A short paper summarising relevant recommendations from the recent report of the Land Reform Review Group was discussed, with consideration being given to their correlation, or otherwise, with the panel's own emerging thinking. And a slightly longer paper on cross border issues examined the current arrangements on the Tweed and Border Esk, and raised the question of whether it will remain appropriate for the Tweed to be treated any differently from other parts of Scotland.

So all in all a month of solid progress underpinned by helpful contributions from a wide and enthusiastic range of stakeholders. But out of every solution it seems another question emerges. There is still some way to go.....

The panel will continue to do all that it can to respond to requests for further meetings with stakeholders, but please be understanding of the fact that as we move into the phase of drafting our report to the Minister time will become more constrained. We do still very much need your input, but we will have to become more efficient at securing it over the next month or two.

If you would like further information about the review, or if you would like to contact the panel chair, please email [wildfisheriesreview@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:wildfisheriesreview@scotland.gsi.gov.uk) or telephone Naeem Bhatti on 0131 244 7061 or write to Wild Fisheries Review, Area 1B North, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh, EH6 6QQ or visit [www.scotland.gov.uk/wildfisheriesreview](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/wildfisheriesreview).

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