

Wild Fisheries Review

MONTHLY BULLETIN FOR JUNE 2014

Welcome to the fourth 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 everyone who has submitted written contributions to the review over the past few weeks. We now have a large amount of material to consider, complementing the feedback that continues to be gained through meetings with stakeholders up and down the country. The panel met on 23 June to consider current progress with eight core work streams. The panel also agreed work priorities for July and had a preliminary discussion about its final report, drafting of which will begin in August.

Further progress has been made to more tightly define the panel's thinking on local Fisheries Management Organisations (FMOs). These will provide the heart of the new system, with a strong emphasis on decentralisation and local empowerment within a national framework. FMOs will be required to fulfil most of the functions currently carried out by fisheries boards and trusts, and they will need to have the capacity to do so effectively. The panel is now working on criteria to define "approved body status" for FMOs, which are likely to include arrangements to ensure openness and accountability, effective management planning and delivery capacity, as well as core skills and competences. Consideration is also being given to the possibility of reserve powers that may be required at a national level to deal with areas of the country where, for whatever reason, it proves impossible to ensure coverage by an approved local FMO.

The panel's thinking on the best way to deliver an effective national leadership function also continues to evolve. There is a growing consensus that this might be some sort of Wild Fisheries Unit within an existing public sector organisation (potentially Marine Scotland), headed by a senior figure of appropriate stature and expertise in fisheries management, and reporting to Ministers perhaps with the title of "Wild Fisheries Commissioner". The unit should bring together existing expertise from across government, including from within Marine Scotland, SEPA and SNH, in order to better coordinate existing capacity. It will need to have the ability to lead and ensure the delivery of national priorities through local FMOs, while at the same time remaining sufficiently hands-off to ensure effective empowerment with respect to local priorities.

The panel continues to grapple with the challenges relating to funding. It now seems likely that the panel will recommend continuation of some form of salmon assessment as the core income source, possibly set partially or wholly at a local level and collected through a single national system. A great deal of thought is also being given to the pros and cons of a fishing licence, recognising that unless payment of a licence fee delivers clear benefits it may not prove popular with many anglers. In this respect the possibility of creating public rights to fish in certain circumstances (and subject to possession of a licence) is being explored, as is dedicating any funds raised to supporting new young anglers and increasing wider participation.

A paper was considered by the panel on 23 June in relation to skills development, training and continuous professional development requirements in the sector. This is an important area of work, and is likely to inform some of the recommendations relating to approved body status for local FMOs. High standards of professionalism will be vital not only in ensuring effective delivery of wild fisheries management on the ground, but also for the credibility and status of the FMOs themselves. In this respect the panel agreed to consider further the possibility of requiring the boards of FMOs to undertake relevant training, and to build this into the thinking about a national leadership function as well.

There is a clear recognition by the panel that it will have to recommend an effective mechanism for better controlling the number of fish killed where a species or population is under conservation threat. This is of particular importance at the current time in relation to salmon, but may also apply to other species both now and in the future. It is likely that any system recommended by the panel will be founded on introducing a ban on killing fish of the defined species without a licence to do so, combined with an effective licence issuing system that includes provision to set quotas (controlled via numbered fish tags) and date limitations.

Such a system would apply to rod fishing and coastal netting alike, and further work on the details is ongoing.

In the course of the last few months comment has been made by a number of stakeholders about the need to review non-compliance with respect to certain areas of fisheries legislation. The panel has now assessed the key issues involved in this, and has agreed in particular to look further at the operation of protection orders and possible inconsistencies in the treatment of different species in relation to protection. There is an acute awareness of the need for legislation that ensures effective conservation of species, while at the same time enabling legitimate angling activity to be pursued with a minimum of constraint in the context of a local fishery management plan.

Central to ensuring more effective management and conservation of our wild fisheries is the research on which management decision making is based. The panel discussed the challenges involved in this at its meeting on 23 June, recognising in particular the significant potential costs, the time horizons involved, and the importance of prioritisation within the limits of available resources. Key drivers for this in the short term are international obligations (notably the Habitats and Water Framework Directives), but it was also noted that the economic importance of sea trout in Scotland makes this species an additional area of priority.

The final subject on the agenda for 23 June was a very thorough paper on developing the social and economic contribution of Scotland's wild fisheries. The panel noted the tourism potential inherent in the sector, and the importance of national leadership in this respect. It was recognised, however, that just as with most other aspects of wild fisheries management it is local initiative and enthusiasm that will have to be harnessed and empowered if national strategy, whether in relation to tourism or wider participation, is to be implemented successfully. Further thought on how best the diverse and cross cutting benefits of the sector might be maximised is a priority.

The next meeting of the panel will take place on 21 July. The panel will be considering detailed and specific draft recommendations under all of the areas of work outlined above, and in addition will examine two further workstreams –

- The recommendations of the Land Reform Review Group and their relevance for this review.
- Cross border issues relating to the Tweed and the Solway.

Over fifty meetings have now been held with stakeholders around the country, with further dates scheduled for July. The panel will continue to try and accommodate all such requests wherever possible. The next monthly progress bulletin will be issued in late July. 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 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.