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Convener
Rural Affairs and Islands Committee
c/o Clerk to the Committee
The Scottish Parliament
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31 July 2023

Dear Finlay,

Rural Affairs and Islands remit evidence session

Thank you for your letter of 12 June 2023 requesting a written response to questions the Committee did not have time to discuss during my recent evidence session as well as the other subjects which I offered to provide further information to the Committee on.

Full details on these questions and subjects are below.

Inshore fisheries

- The timescales for the inshore fisheries management commitments in the Bute House agreement with regard to the inshore fisheries cap, review of scallop entitlements, and vessel tracking and monitoring;

Further information

The Bute House Agreement includes three specific proposals for commercial fishing vessel management:

- Applying a cap to fishing activity in inshore waters (up to three nautical miles) that will limit activity to current levels and set a ceiling from which activities that disrupt the seabed can be reduced in the light of evidence as it becomes available.
- Reviewing the management of unused 'latent' scallop fishing entitlements.
- Extending the requirement for vessel tracking and monitoring systems by the end of the current parliamentary session.

The proposals build on the actions in our Fisheries Management Strategy which sets out our approach to managing sea fisheries in Scotland in partnership with our stakeholders, to deliver the best results for the future of our marine environment, our fishing industry and the communities that rely on them.

Proposals to cap inshore fishing activity and reviewing unused scallop entitlements are important building blocks in delivering that balance between environmental, economic and

social outcomes. Good progress is being made with the policy proposals and, observing our co-management approach, we will progress these further through our Regional Inshore Fisheries Group network and Fisheries Management and Conservation group, prior to full consultation.

Extending the vessel tracking and monitoring requirement will greatly improve our scientific evidence base and help ensure compliance with regulations, including spatial management measures such as the proposed cap on inshore fishing activity. Working with industry, we have been trialling such technology, including through our Outer Hebrides pilot, and intend to launch a consultation this summer on extending the tracking and monitoring requirement.

Future Catching Policy

- The progress made on the consultation analysis of the Future Catching Policy and remote electronic monitoring, and the timescales for legislation in relation to these;

Further information

I am happy to confirm that the consultation analysis for both the Future Catching Policy and Remote Electronic Monitoring have been finalised and will be published in due course. Further work will then be taken to deliver the priorities in the Future Catching Policy.

However, work is well underway in relation to preparing legislation for the introduction of mandatory REM on board all scallop dredge and pelagic trawl (including freezer) vessels. The intention is for legislation to be laid by the end of 2023.

Scottish Veterinary Service

- Whether the Scottish Government has received recommendations from the Programme Board on the proposed Scottish Veterinary Service, and the timetable for progressing this work;

Further information

The Programme Board has the objective of establishing a Scottish Veterinary Service (SVS) by 1 April 2025 and continues to gather evidence to support the appraisal of options on a potential new SVS based on quality, efficiency, resilience, value for money and cost, also considering the potential risks. A Summary of Options is currently being developed. The proposed new service is expected to bring together a range of public health and animal health and welfare services, creating a new, bespoke model of delivery for the people, animals, environment and economy of Scotland.

Commitment to consult on legislation to extend the framework for the licensing of activities involving animals

- How much progress has been made towards the Scottish Government's commitment to consult on legislation to extend the framework for the licensing of activities involving animals, and what specific activities are being considered for licensing;

Further information

Regarding our consultation on extending the scope of The Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (Scotland) Regulations 2021 to other animal activities, I can confirm that the consultation launched on 4 July 2023 and will close on 26 September 2023. The consultation seeks views on proposals to extend statutory licensing to dog walkers, dog groomers, livery services, canine fertility businesses and greyhound racing. Further, it proposes to revoke existing legislation covering riding establishments and animal boarding, regulating these instead under the 2021 licensing framework.

I would also take this opportunity to correct the reply I gave to Christine Grahame MSP at our meeting on 31 May when she asked if animal rescue and rehoming centres would be included in the Scottish Government's licensing consultation. I incorrectly responded that they would be, but animal rescue and rehoming centres are, in fact, already subject to statutory licensing under the 2021 animal licensing framework. I apologise to the Committee for any confusion caused.

Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act

- The timescales for the commencement of key sections of the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act, specifically the publication of a national Good Food Nation Plan and the establishment of a Scottish Food Commission;

Further information

The Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act 2022 (Commencement No. 1) Regulations 2023 were laid before the Scottish Parliament on 16 June 2023. These regulations will bring into force most of the provisions in the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act 2022 that relate to the national plan.

These include sections relating to the preparation of the Plan and the requirements for inclusive communication, which enables us to go out to public consultation on the first national Good Food Nation Plan this summer, as follows:

Coming into force on 30 June:

- Section 1 Requirement to produce plan
- Section 2 Preparation of plan: principles
- Section 4 Preparation of plan: consultation
- Section 5 Preparation of plan: consideration of international instruments
- Section 9 Publication of documents: inclusive communications

Other sections will come into force in December, these relate to giving Parliament the chance to have its say on the Good Food Nation Plan and will begin the cycle of reporting and reviewing of future Good Food Nation Plans.

Coming into force on 31 December:

- Section 3 Requirement to lay proposed plan before the Parliament
- Section 7 Reporting
- Section 8 Review and revision of plan

The remaining sections of the Act will be commenced as follows:

- Section 6 of the Act, which relates to the effect of the national plan, will be commenced in separate regulations at the time of the publication of the final plan in late 2024.
- The sections of the Act which relate to the Scottish Food Commission (Sections 19, 20, 21, 22 and 23) and the relevant authority plans (Sections 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18) will be commenced in separate regulations in 2024.

Changes to the operating structure of Marine Scotland

- The changes that have been made to the operating structure of Marine Scotland, whether the structure will be changed in the future, and the impact of those changes on engagement with the fishing and aquaculture industry;

Further information

The [Marine Directorate](#), formerly Marine Scotland, is a core part of the Scottish Government, with responsibilities including a wide policy remit in relation to the marine environment and economy, the provision of a scientific evidence-base to inform policy and sustainably manage resources, and marine licensing and compliance. It is made up of around 800 employees, including mariners, compliance officers, scientists and colleagues with strategy, policy and business services expertise. The Directorate assumed its current form in 2009 when former agencies Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency and Fisheries Research Services were brought back under the central Scottish Government umbrella. Earlier this year, work related to offshore wind was separated into another directorate (the Offshore Wind Directorate) to better accommodate growth in this area.

We are no longer using the name 'Marine Scotland' as it implies the directorate is an agency rather than a core part of Scottish Government, which can sometimes make it more challenging for staff and stakeholders to appreciate how our work is integral to the delivery of overarching Scottish Government goals. The name Marine Directorate is in line with naming conventions of other Scottish Government directorates.

A more project based and outcome focused approach to the Marine Directorate's work is being adopted, moving away from the traditional civil service divisional structure, the directorate therefore expects to be in a stronger position to maximise opportunities and mitigate negative impacts in the marine space. Work is currently organised across five portfolios, set out below. We will continue to engage frequently and in depth with a wide range of stakeholders across all the issues within our purview; the new operating structure will create the potential to do that in the most coordinated and effective way across multiple strands of work. Many partners will experience no change, and all should continue to engage with their normal contacts who will let them know of any new arrangements in due course.

- Corporate, Strategy and Marine Planning Portfolio
- Marine Environment (Climate and Biodiversity) Portfolio
- Marine Economy and Communities Portfolio
- Science, Evidence. Digital and Data Portfolio
- Operational Delivery Portfolio

£33 million allocated to Agriculture

- When the £33 million that was removed from the budget allocated toward agriculture can be expected to be returned;

Further information

This funding is ring fenced, the total amount available will remain the same, and will be returned to the portfolio in future years to spend on agriculture, ensuring this money is best used to deliver upon Scotland's rural priorities. There was no impact on existing commitments or schemes, and it had no impact on the National Test Programme.

Future budgets are set through the annual parliamentary Budget Bill process and the appropriate profile for returning this funding will be considered as part of the 2024-25 process. You will want to note that the Deputy First Minister met recently with NFU Scotland and provided them with a categorical guarantee that this funding will be returned to the

RALRI budget. [NFU Scotland Receives Categorical Assurance from Deputy First Minister that £33 Million Deferred Funding will be Returned to Rural Budget](#)

Farmers and Crofters

- A strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats analysis on the challenges faced by farmers and crofters in Scotland

Further information

I have taken this request to refer to our work on food security. The Food Security Unit's initial focus will be to develop evidence-based systems to monitor risks or threats to the supply chain to help mitigate future shocks and impacts on food security.

The Unit is current considering a monitoring system with three strands: immediate supply chain disruption, global food security, and Scotland-specific measures. While it is not possible to predict all impacts, enhanced monitoring enables the development of greater long-term insight into local and global supply chain performance. This will improve responsiveness to potential crises and help identify areas where Government, industry, and the wider public can improve resilience.

The Unit is building relationships with key policy areas across the Scottish Government working on food production and resilience, farming, trade, critical infrastructure and preparedness, diet, and financial wellbeing, to be able to bring a food security lens to policy development in those areas.

I hope this information is helpful to the Committee.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mairi Gougeon', written in a cursive style.

MAIRI GOUGEON