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Convener of Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural
Environment Committee
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
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18 December 2024

Dear Finlay,

AMENDMENTS TO ANNEX A OF THE JOINT FISHERIES STATEMENT

I would like to thank you for the positive response provided by the Committee with regard to the amendment of Annex A of the Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS) on 22 November 2024.

Consultation summary and government response

I am pleased to say that officials across the four UK fisheries policy administrations have considered the responses received to the Consultation which was held between 10 October and 21 November 2024 and have prepared the Summary of responses and the joint UK 'Government response' and the full report can be accessed via this [Joint Fisheries Statement: proposed amendments to Annex A - GOV.UK](#). A total of 39 responses were received from a range of organisations and individuals across the UK of which 12 responses came from stakeholders in Scotland.

The updated Annex A will be published on the JFS page [Joint Fisheries Statement \(JFS\) - GOV.UK](#)

Proposed extension of the publication deadline for FMPs

As expected, the proposal to extend the publication deadline for FMPs received the most attention, with the large majority (31) supporting this proposal.



The same applied to the responses which came from the stakeholders in Scotland and I thought it would be useful to outline here a number of common themes that were highlighted:

- The majority (two thirds) of responses from Scottish stakeholders agreed with the delay and said it was important and justified to ensure that the FMPs were done well rather than done quickly. Many noted that the delivery of FMPs was a complex process and additional time was needed to ensure that valuable lessons from the front-runner FMPs were used to develop other FMPs. Some argued that the delay would not herald any absence of fisheries management as there was considerable management already in place.
- Of the four responses (one third) who responded 'no' to this question some said that any delay would have a negative impact on the fisheries policy authorities' ability to manage fish stocks sustainably, or it would have a negative impact on the marine environment and achieving GES. There were suggestions that any extension should be shorter with the delivery of Scottish-led FMPs by end of 2025 instead of end of 2026. There also some criticism around the content, particularly around the fisheries objectives, in some of the early drafts of FMPs and some concerns that several actions within the proposed Nephrops FMP might conflict with the National Marine Plan. A few respondents sought assurances that FMPs are still being prioritised and want clarification on the new proposed deadlines and workplan to achieve them.

I note the Committee's recommendation **that, where possible, FMPs are published, and take effect, on a phased basis rather than all published together at the end of 2026**. My officials have developed an indicative timeline which is attached in the Annex to this letter. The timeline includes information on the pre-consultation and formal consultation stages to ensure appropriate participation of the fishing industry and other stakeholders in the FMP process.

Some concerns about merging the North Sea and West of Scotland Cod FMPs also came through some of the responses to the consultation, although respondents acknowledged that it reflected latest scientific advice. I note the Committee's recommendation **that its successor committee monitor these issues when FMPs are agreed**, and welcome further discussions on this subject. To reassure the Committee and our stakeholders who have raised these concerns, this proposal reflects the latest scientific understanding of the stock, bringing the FMPs in line with ICES advice structures. Any relevant area-specific management measures for the North Sea and West of Scotland will be considered, as required, through the FMP development.

Finally, I told the Committee that I would provide an update on the review of the Fisheries Management and Conservation (FMAC) group and Regional Inshore Fisheries Groups. The review of these groups is currently ongoing, and I would be happy to update the Committee once this work is finalised.

Next steps

FMPs are undoubtedly going to be an important mechanism for delivering our ambitions to achieve world-class, sustainable fisheries and we will continue to deliver them against the revised publication deadlines as set out in the amended Annex A of the JFS. However, FMPs will not remain static. Plans will adapt and iterate over time as further evidence is gathered and measures contained within published plans are implemented.

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Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you need further information.

Yours sincerely,



MAIRI GOUGEON

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ANNEX - Indicative timeline for FMPs development

Demersal and Nephrops FMPs

Item	Timeline
Review of demersal & nephrops FMPs with other UK Fisheries authorities	December 2024 to March 2025
Pre-consultation stage with stakeholders	January to March 2025
Redrafting and clearance across the other UK Fisheries authorities	March to early August 2025
Consultation (tentative dates) – 12 week period	Mid-August to mid-November 2025
Analysis of consultation and redrafting of FMPs in response	Mid-November 2025 to early 2026
FMPs finalised and published	Spring 2026

Pelagic FMPs

Task	Timeline
Review of pelagic FMPs and input by other UK Fisheries authorities	March to August 2025
Pre-consultation stage with stakeholders	July to August 2025
Redrafting and clearance across the other UK Fisheries authorities	September 2025 to February 2026
Consultation, analysis of results and publication	Summer 2026

All timescales are draft and subject to change.

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