

PE2110/H: Protect wild wrasse stocks

Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands written submission, 9 September 2025

I understand that the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee are considering Petition, PE2110, calling for a Fisheries Management Plan for the wrasse fishery in Scotland's waters on 10 September 2025. My apologies for this late submission in relation to the Petitioner's most recent concerns, including about the evidence base used to inform the open and closed season for the wrasse fishery.

Management decisions for the wrasse fishery in Scotland are made using the best available evidence. While data from the Cefas study were initially used to inform the timing of the Scottish wrasse fishery, it was recognised that biological information specific to wrasse in Scottish waters was lacking. To address this, a dedicated PhD study was commissioned in October 2021 and completed earlier this year, specifically focusing on wrasse on the west coast of Scotland. The Marine Directorate of the Scottish Government are now utilising the data collected from this PhD study, in combination with the Cefas dataset, to strengthen the evidence base. Combining the Cefas and PhD datasets has increased the overall sample size and improved confidence in the analysis.

I also note the petitioner's view that there is *'nothing relating to managing the fishery outwith Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) or Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)'*. I disagree with that statement because new management measures were introduced for the wrasse fishery in 2021 and applied across Scottish waters, not just SACs and MPAs. These measures include minimum / maximum landing sizes, a limit on the amount of fishing gear that can be used (250 creels) and a temporal closure. Further, it is important to remember that the wrasse fishery in Scotland is not an open fishery, the Marine Directorate controls access to it each year via an application process.

In relation to Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs), we have been clear that our resources are currently focussed on delivering the statutory commitment in The UK Fisheries Act and UK Joint Fisheries Statement for the production of 43 FMPs, of which the Scottish Government is the lead coordinating authority for 22. We are unable to confirm, or commit to, the production of additional FMPs beyond those currently in development. However, we have commissioned the Sea Fish Industry Authority (Seafish) to undertake initial scoping work to help inform our approach to non-quota species (which includes wrasse) FMPs in Scotland. This work with Seafish is ongoing and we will consider the outputs in 2026.

More widely, in June 2025 the Scottish Government published its Fisheries Assessment on the interaction between the wrasse fishery and the Marine Protected Areas network which was informed by advice from NatureScot. The Assessment and advice from NatureScot are published on the Scottish Government website [Supporting documents - Inshore waters - regulated commercial use of traps/pots to catch wrasse: fisheries assessment - gov.scot](#). New management measures introduced for the 2025 fishery (in addition to those set out above) include spatial restrictions for wrasse fishing and an amendment to the temporal closure dates. A clear demonstration that an FMP is not required to actively manage the wrasse fishery; management measures are in place for the fishery and continue to be kept under review.

I hope this is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

MAIRI GOUGEON