

Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform
and Islands

Rùnaire a' Chaibineit airson Chùisean Dùthchail, Ath-
leasachadh Fearainn agus Eileanan

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Our Reference: 202500487258

Your Reference: (Case Ref: JB33161)

13 October 2025

Dear Jackie,

Thank you for your letter of 1 October 2025 on behalf of your constituents, the Loch Lomond Angling Improvement Association (LLAIA), regarding their concerns on the proposed river gradings for the 2026 salmon fishing season under the Conservation of Salmon Regulations.

I am aware that the LLAIA have responded to the river gradings consultation which ran over the summer, and my officials will be providing a response to them directly as part of that process.

All rivers that are in poor conservation status, and as such have a less than 60% chance of meeting their conservation limit, are subject to mandatory catch and release through the Conservation of Salmon (Scotland) Regulations 2016. This means that all salmon, regardless of how they are caught, must be returned to the river with least possible harm. **This does not stop anyone from taking part in fishing activities, providing they operate within the regulations and local conditions stated on permits or permissions.** These permits or permissions are still able to be sold and generate income in rivers with poor status, they would just not have the ability to retain salmon.

The Conservation of Salmon (Scotland) Regulations 2016 do not stop anyone from fishing, it is only the retention of salmon which is prohibited on rivers which are in poor conservation status. Many rivers across Scotland voluntarily operate on a catch and release basis even in cases where the rivers are in good or moderate conservation status.

My officials have had numerous discussions with the LLAIA over 2025, despite the impression given in your letter. A full breakdown of engagements is listed in the table below for your ease of reference and Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

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we have provided some explanations on the discussions that have taken place below.

Date	Who met with LLAIA	Summary of discussion
10 March 2025 onwards	Marine Directorate (MD) Wild Salmon and Recreational Fisheries (WSARF) officials email exchanges	To arrange a meeting and collect data from the LLAIA
17 April 2025	MD WSARF officials	Multiple topics covering: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement in a stakeholder led enforcement committee • 'Missing' data in the assessment [the result of which was the follow up meeting on 29 May 2025] • Seal management • LLAIA requested information on stocking
25 April 2025	MD WSARF email exchange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LLAIA were provided with a note of the 17 April meeting including actions required from both MD and LLAIA. • MD provided information on acoustic deterrent devices (ADDs) in relation to seal management.
2 May 2025	MD WSARF email exchange	LLAIA made changes to the 17 April meeting note and confirmed their actions to take forward.
29 May 2025	MD Science Evidence Data and Digital (SEDD) officials	Mapping out of areas along the Endrick and Blain waters (areas that LLAIA had claimed were 'missing' in MD data)
30 May 2025	MD WSARF email exchange	17 April meeting note finalised, LLAIA asked for an update on the actions they held, and MD provided information on stocking.
September - October 2025	MD SEDD email exchange	To clarify extents of fisheries occupied by LLAIA near the confluence of the Blain and Endrick Waters

At the 17 April 2025 meeting, LLAIA maintained that MD 'did not have sufficient data to down grade the Endrick Special Area of Conservation (SAC)'. This claim follows the Directorate's annual request to fishery owners asking them to confirm the information held by us (i.e. if the fishery information is correct, whether the fishery is fished or not (dormant) and if fished the numbers of salmon and sea trout caught).

My officials then met with the LLAIA on 29 May 2025, at Strathearn House, Perth to exchange information on fisheries on the Endrick Water Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Following the meeting we have undertaken a thorough review of the extents, ownership and occupancy of salmon fishing rights on the Endrick and Blain Waters; this has included very recent clarification of minor issues with the LLAIA. We have purchased Title Deeds for 26 properties from the Land Register. As a result:

- 18 previously unknown salmon fisheries have been added to the Directorate's records, whilst the ownership/occupancy of rights on one small section of river remains obscure.
- Of these 18 "new" fisheries, 13 are occupied by LLAIA, four have been confirmed to be not fished (dormant) and we are attempting to contact one other recently identified fishery owner. The occupancy of those 13 fisheries by the LLAIA increases the Directorate's confidence that there are no significant fisheries on the Endrick from which catches are not obtained.

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Following these exchanges between LLAIA and the Marine Directorate, no significant changes have been identified to the information held by the Marine Directorate. To confirm, that includes through the discussions with the LLAIA and the further searches carried out by MD officials.

I note that LLAIA have indicated that they wish to contest the 2025 regulations. These are based on the most up to date assessment data, and contesting them would not change the conservation status of the Endrick SAC. This is because the 2024 regulations (Endrick SAC in poor status) would remain in place if the 2025 regulations were to be annulled. This would however have impacts on other fisheries across Scotland as the conservation status would therefore be based on out-of-date information for those (7) rivers which have been proposed to change in the 2025 regulations.

Within the recommended management actions for each of the three conservation status' (good, moderate and poor) it is only those river areas where a 'poor' conservation status has been assigned that mandatory catch and release is enforced. This does not stop anyone from taking part in fishing activities, providing they operate within the regulations and local conditions stated on permits or permissions. Fisheries managers have a role in setting local restrictions in relation to the encouragement of voluntary catch and release of salmon to rivers which are in 'good' or moderate' conservation status, as they see fit. These are often referred to as 'existing non-statutory local management interventions' and many rivers across Scotland encourage voluntary catch and release even in rivers with good conservation status.

Catch return forms are requested each year, with multiple chases for replies to every fishery owner, including the LLAIA. It is their duty to supply accurate information when requested under the 2003 Act. From the exchanges in 2025 the Marine Directorate has no reason to believe that there are significant stretches of the system for which we do not receive catch returns, as the LLAIA confirmed that they have supplied all the returns for which they have ownership or lease. Additionally, my officials have confirmed that they have previously updated the fisheries listed on the LLAIA catch form for the Endrick in 2018 (three additional fisheries) and 2021 (one additional fishery) following receipt of information from the LLAIA.

I include for ease of reference the text from the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 2003 with regards to the information collected by Marine Directorate.

Power of Scottish Ministers to conduct inquiries and to obtain information

The duty to provide information to Scottish Ministers is under section 64(2) of the [Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries \(Consolidation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2003](#), wilfully refusing to do so is an offence and upon summary conviction, can result in a fine of up to £1,000. Please note that catch return forms must be submitted no later than 31 December.

64. — (2) Any person having rights in a salmon fishery or freshwater fishery who wilfully refuses to comply with any requirement made in pursuance of this section, or makes any statement in relation to such a requirement which is false in a material particular, shall be guilty of an offence, and liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 3 on the standard scale.

Regarding your point about LLAIA bailiffs having 'seen and recorded the catching of salmon on non-LLAIA stretches of the River Endrick', I presume the water bailiffs would have checked at the time that those fishing had the appropriate permits or permissions to do so and that any taking of salmon

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occurred before [The Conservation of Salmon \(Miscellaneous Amendment\) \(Scotland\) Regulations 2024](#) came into force. As you may be aware, water bailiffs can be appointed by Scottish Ministers in places where District Salmon Fishery Boards (DSFBs) do not exist. This is the case in the Loch Lomond area where the LLAIA, as the appropriate nominating organisation, have applied for water bailiffs under The [Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries \(Consolidation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2003](#). Sections [8](#), [54](#) and [55](#) of the 2003 Act sets out the powers of water bailiffs. There is further information on our [Enforcement](#) webpage, if you would find that helpful. Water bailiffs exercise the powers conferred by the 2003 Act to prevent the illegal taking of salmon or trout.

I hope this information assures you that there has been extensive engagement with the LLAIA and that every reasonable effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the data used in the conservation assessment. As noted above there has been no substantial change in evidence and therefore the proposed poor conservation status of the Endrick would not change.

I have copied this letter to the Convenor of the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee.

Yours sincerely,



MAIRI GOUGEON

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