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Dear Finlay,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide additional information on the Conservation of Salmon (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2025, following the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee consideration during its meeting on 14 January 2026. Please find this information below.

Annually, the Marine Directorate (MD) sends ~2,200 catch forms to fishery managers and has a 92-94% return rate. This is a high rate of return, which gives a similarly high confidence in the data collected. For comparison, 63% of rod licence holders in England and Wales made a catch return in 2024 ([Salmonid and freshwater fisheries statistics for 2024 - GOV.UK](#)), and [Scotland's Census](#) in 2022 had an 89% return rate.

With respect to Ms Baillie's comments during the meeting, regarding the Endrick Water Special Area of Conservation (SAC), the stock assessment undertaken in 2025 was based on catch data relevant to >95% of the bank fishing available within this Special Area of Conservation for salmon. The majority of additional fisheries found during the review in 2025 were as a result of the Loch Lomond Angling Improvement Association (LLAIA) not providing the correct fisheries information on their catch returns. We now know more about where the salmon were caught but the numbers of salmon caught have not changed, as the LLAIA had already reported their catches.

Fish counters

In 2008 a fish counter was provided to Loch Lomond Fisheries Trust (the LLAIA are a Trustee) by Scottish Natural Heritage (now NatureScot). The counter was intended for use on the Endrick Water SAC but it was not installed by the Trust and thus count data for the Endrick are not available to the Marine Directorate.

Fish counter data are used in two ways during MD's assessment of salmon stocks:

1. to understand and model the relationship between catches and adult abundance (allowing catch data to inform on abundance in rivers without counters);
2. for those rivers with counters, their data are used to estimate the abundance of salmon in that river.

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Fish counting is costly in terms of capital investment and on-going maintenance and operation. MD works closely with stakeholders, including several river and fisheries Trusts, to obtain quality data wherever possible. Since 2020, through the MD and Marine Fund Scotland, the Scottish Government has spent over £1.2 million in capital funding on six fish counters. In 2024 and 2025, Marine Fund Scotland has also awarded £337,000 in grants to improve the processing and analysis of fish counter data, including through the development and use of new AI tools.

Additional funding for Marine Fund Scotland was recently announced in the Scottish budget for 2026/27 and interested parties will be able to bid for the purchase of new fish counting equipment in 2026.

As outlined above it can be an involved and costly process to input and maintain fish counters, involving many different stakeholders and organisations such as Fisheries Trusts, Atlantic Salmon Trust, NatureScot, SSE and others. We have an interest in making sure that areas suggested for a fish counter will bring additional good quality data to feed into the models used to support Conservation of Salmon assessments and part of that is ensuring that they are appropriately placed and operationally supported by local partners to provide that information, although there are various factors that feed into the overall assessment of whether a fish counter will work in an area or not.

National Electrofishing Programme for Scotland (NEPS)

I thank the Committee for their interest in the latest NEPS report which was published in 2025 and included data from the most recent national survey in 2023. As noted in the report, the programme was funded in 2018 primarily by Scottish Government's Marine Scotland (now Marine Directorate) with contributions from NatureScot and SEPA. During 2019 and 2021 funding was provided by Marine Scotland and Crown Estate Scotland, and in 2023 data collection was funded solely by Marine Directorate. Across all the years that NEPS ran as a full national survey programme the project management, laboratory analysis, data analysis and reporting were funded directly by the Marine Directorate. The cost of NEPS sampling was circa £420,000 for each survey.

There are many benefits in running a centralised juvenile monitoring and assessment programme, which extend across public, private and third sector organisations. However, funding for a full national programme remains challenging, especially given the significant resource constraints on Scottish Government at the present time. Furthermore, juvenile assessment is not required as part of the current Conservation Regulations process. Consequently, there was no national programme in 2024 or 2025 and there is no budget for work in 2026. Officials are currently exploring options to deliver Scotland's juvenile monitoring and assessment needs. This needs to be undertaken in partnership with our external stakeholders and delivery partners as the financial and resource implications need to be considered to ensure value for money for the taxpayer, and balanced with the benefits of a full national programme across the various public and private sector organisations.

I hope this information is helpful in answering the Committee's queries.

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Yours sincerely,



MAIRI GOUGEON

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