



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee

**Tuesday 28 January 2020**

**Session 5**



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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**ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE AND LAND REFORM COMMITTEE**  
**3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting 2020, Session 5**

**CONVENER**

\*Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)

**DEPUTY CONVENER**

\*Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

\*Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab)

\*Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)

\*Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP)

\*Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)

\*Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)

\*attended

**THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:**

Dr John Armstrong (Marine Scotland Science)

Dr Antje Branding (Marine Scotland)

Keith Main (Marine Scotland)

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Lynn Tullis

**LOCATION**

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)



## Scottish Parliament

### Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee

*Tuesday 28 January 2020*

*[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:32]*

### Decision on Taking Business in Private

**The Convener (Gillian Martin):** Welcome to the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee's third meeting of 2020. I remind everyone to switch off their mobile phones or to turn them to silent, as they might affect the broadcasting system.

Agenda item 1 is to ask whether members are content to take in private agenda item 4 and all future consideration of the committee's approach to the climate change plan. Do we agree to do that?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

## Subordinate Legislation

### Conservation of Salmon (Scotland) Amendment (No 2) Regulations 2019 (SSI 2019/426)

09:32

**The Convener:** Under agenda item 2, we will hear from Marine Scotland officials on the Conservation of Salmon (Scotland) Amendment (No 2) Regulations 2019. I am delighted to welcome our colleagues: Dr Antje Branding, policy team leader, and Keith Main, policy manager for salmon and recreational fisheries, who are both from Marine Scotland; and Dr John Armstrong, director of the freshwater fisheries laboratory, who is from Marine Scotland science.

Our briefing paper sets out a number of themes and issues that we will explore with the witnesses. We have about 30 minutes in which to do that. Members will recall that the committee took evidence on the previous regulations and that it had some on-going concerns. What concerns have been thrown up by Marine Scotland's engagement with the wider population?

**Keith Main (Marine Scotland):** Over the past two or three years—since I have been in post—we have tried to expand our stakeholder engagement and our discussions with people about how we take forward the regulations. When the previous regulations were introduced, in 2016, they came in quite quickly. We have developed our modelling, which Dr Armstrong can talk about quite a bit.

The legislation requires us to undertake a public consultation on our proposals each year, and we have tried to bring forward and expand that consultation each year. For example, in July, we published our proposals for the current regulations on the Marine Scotland website, and we provided very detailed background information on the scientific model and on the proposals for the river grading. As we are required to do, we published that information in the three main newspapers in Scotland over a couple of weeks last July.

We have a mailing list of more than 1,500 people who have, over the years, expressed an interest in Atlantic salmon and wild fisheries. We have mailed them to direct them to the consultation.

This year, we have also tried to engage better through the Marine Scotland Twitter account. On our website, colleagues in the marine lab have done quite a nice little explanatory video of why we do the conservation assessment as we do it, which I think is generally welcomed.

It is interesting that, over the four weeks of the consultation, we had 39 formal responses, which is exactly the same number of responses that we had the previous year. They covered a range of issues, with questions about the model and requests for more information. Some people believe that we should go further or take a different approach.

Colleagues in the team have engaged with every one of the 39 respondents. Sometimes, that was just a matter of pointing them towards additional information; sometimes, there has been on-going correspondence. We have held meetings over the telephone and have had one or two face-to-face meetings.

Throughout the year, we engage with district salmon fishery boards, Fisheries Management Scotland and other organisations to keep improving the knowledge of our stakeholders about how we do the modelling and what the results mean.

**The Convener:** Claudia Beamish will pick up on some of the concerns that we are aware of.

**Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab):** Those of you who were around during the previous parliamentary session will recall that there were far more MSPs round this table, asking questions on behalf of constituents, fishery boards and trusts. Has the situation settled down now? If so, is that because there is more understanding as a result of your work and because of concerns about the conservation of salmon as an iconic and protected species? Or is it for other reasons that there is less interaction on the issue?

**Keith Main:** It is fair to say that we have a lot of interaction throughout the year—it does not happen only when we are carrying out the public consultation part of the regulations. Generally, people have accepted—or are accepting—that we need to take some difficult steps to conserve salmon in the longer term. That is not always popular on an individual angler-by-angler basis or on a river-by-river basis. However, for every response that we get from people saying that they do not think that their river should be a grade 3 river—that is one where catch and release is mandatory—we get some river boards saying to us, “You are allowing catch and release, but we think that we have to do more to conserve the stocks. Can you not move the model and make us a grade 3?”

To a certain extent, it depends on the area of Scotland that we are dealing with, the other rivers in the locality and the management interventions of the district salmon fishery boards and trusts. There is still a wide range of views on how we model and on how the regulations are framed, but

I think that there is a better understanding that we are taking a long-term approach.

I think that there is also a better understanding that Scotland is taking an approach that others are looking at. For example, south of the border, we are very engaged with the administrations in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. We are talking about how we do things and we are learning from each other.

**Claudia Beamish:** Will you give an update on the arrangements for the haaf-netters in the Solway? I do not think that any netting stations are active on the east coast, but I may be wrong.

**Keith Main:** There are none for haaf-netting, but there are netting stations in-river for other types of netting. I was not around in 2016, but that is when we started a three-year project—it ran from 2016 through to 2018—with the haaf-netters on the Solway, which allowed a certain number of salmon to be caught and retained under licence. We worked closely with them to take samples, and some of the study results are available.

In the longer term, the haaf-netters in the estuary are working in what we term a “mixed-stock fishery”, which means that they are catching fish at a point when we are not sure which rivers they are going to go to. Some of the rivers that feed the Solway estuary are grade 1, grade 2 and grade 3 rivers. In those circumstances, not just for the haaf-netters but for other parts of Scotland, we have said that, if there is a mixed-stock fishery, we cannot allow fishing in the estuary or the firth. Sorry—that is wrong. We can allow fishing but we cannot allow the retention of salmon.

The haaf-netting community on the Solway are able to fish: they are able to catch and release Atlantic salmon and they are able to catch and retain sea trout should they catch them. However, at the moment, because of the way in which we grade the rivers and because of the grading of some of the rivers in that estuary, they are not able to retain salmon.

**Claudia Beamish:** I will check something quickly—I am sure that we can have further conversations about it, if that is appropriate. It has been highlighted to me that the scientific suggestion is that there is less mortality from that process than there is with catch and release, because the hook does not go into the salmon’s mouth. Therefore, is it possible that the haaf-netters could keep more fish? Have you looked into that?

**Dr John Armstrong (Marine Scotland Science):** We have not looked into that, but I see the logic of that position. There would not necessarily be a need to take the fish out of the water, which is one of the key issues. Typically, anglers catch only in the order of 10 per cent of

the fish that are moving upstream, and, of that 10 per cent, they now release in the order of 90 per cent. There is, therefore, evidence of very little damage from catch and release in angling in those numbers.

In rivers that are in poor conservation status, we just do not want fish killed, I am afraid.

**Claudia Beamish:** I would appreciate it if you could look into that issue and get back to the committee.

**Dr Armstrong:** Sure.

**Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** In the past, we have seen a lot more responses from rivers and wherever. A lot of that was because there was not a huge amount of confidence in the science that was used to grade the rivers. I know that there has been no change in the assessment methodology, but it would appear that more people now accept the river grades. I believe that everybody wants to preserve salmon, and they want to look at the science. Can you tell us about the on-going work to develop your model? How will that give even more confidence to the managers of rivers that the grading has been carried out correctly? How do you use juvenile assessments as part of that model?

**Dr Armstrong:** There is now more understanding of the limits of the available data. One can work only with the data that are available, and to collect more data is very expensive and time consuming. It is a question of developing models that use information that can readily be obtained. The fact that we have perhaps communicated that more effectively has made a difference.

As the committee requested, we are publishing data on the adult model. We have published a paper on fecundity, which is now available, and we are working on two other papers. Those should be brought to a conclusion within the three-year period during which we have agreed to hold things steady. We will make further developments. For example, we are working with folk in Wales to find an improved method of stock assessment, which will improve the model to some extent.

In the meantime, we have been developing the juvenile assessment approach. All that modelling work has now been published and is available. We have consulted widely on that, and people generally understand how that can feed into the process. Certainly, the trusts and boards that we have talked to are content with that.

We have now had one year of electrofishing in the national electrofishing programme for Scotland. The data from that are in and have been analysed, and the second year's data are in and are currently being analysed. That will give us two

years of data. The next step in the process is to look at how the two models—the adult and juvenile models—can be brought together into an assessment method. It will be important to consult on that. Both modelling approaches have their strengths and weaknesses, and there is an issue about how we bring them together, because they are done on rather different scales. The adult modelling is done on a river-by-river basis, which is what we, as a committee, have moved towards. The juvenile modelling is done on a regional basis, so it does not give the same precision. We will have to take those factors into account as we come up with a new assessment approach that brings in the two models.

Overall, I am pleased with progress, which is on the sort of timescale that we anticipated. This year, there will be a lot of activity to see how we can bring the models together.

09:45

**Finlay Carson:** We have heard previously about the importance of fish counters, that there is a lack of them and that they are expensive to install. Are there plans to roll out more fish counters? Is your budget for salmon conservation going up or down? Do we need more money to ensure that we get the best science?

**Dr Armstrong:** We are further developing a fish counter strategy. We will consult local fisheries biologists on the latest work on that next week, at their annual meeting. Last year, we started work on a fish counter on the River Ayr, which is important strategically, as it is in an area of the country where we need more information. We took the opportunity to put in a counter there while civil works were being done on a weir, so that was fairly economical. On the east coast, we are working with the Esk District Salmon Fishery Board to consider a counter for the South Esk. That project is in progress. We have also spent quite a lot of time repairing our counters, which obviously is a demand on resources.

Budgets are an important issue. At the moment, we have the same individuals moving between various projects that are occurring in parallel. There is a growing understanding of the issue and a sense of urgency around managing salmon. Certainly, now is a good time to consider whether a budget uplift is possible. The salmon strategy, which Antje Branding will talk about, will obviously include some of the thinking on budgeting going forward.

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** How is climate change fed into the models? Particularly in a wetted area, if there are drought conditions or issues with water levels or

water temperature, how might that affect the predicted egg count?

**Dr Armstrong:** That is an important issue. Warming of upland areas, particularly in Scotland, is now really serious. Salmon operate best in temperatures in the teens, at around 16°C. Once we get up into the high 20s, we start to have serious problems. With the temperatures that we now have in Scotland, we are already up to levels that can cause problems for salmon. At the moment, we work with juvenile models at a given temperature. If warming continues, we will need to continue to examine the models and recalibrate. However, we have plans to increase river shading, which we hope will provide opportunities to ameliorate some of the temperatures. We are in an unusual situation with climate change and salmon in that we can actually act and make a difference. If we shade rivers, we can start to bring temperatures down to levels that are good for not just salmon but other animals and ecosystems in rivers.

**Finlay Carson:** I want to ask about the controversial topic of restocking rivers. Are you doing any work on the impact of restocking? Some rivers are restocked using eggs that are taken from wild salmon from that particular river.

**Dr Armstrong:** We have done a lot of work on that over the years. For example, we know that, if we rear wild salmon to smolt stage and then release the fish, which seems a sensible way of avoiding limitations on growing fish in a river, only a tenth as many fish come back as would do if they were reared properly as wild fish—they simply do not develop properly.

With regard to juveniles, the key work that we have done has been to refine our understanding so that we can avoid damaging populations by negatively affecting the local gene pools. If we look back, on the basis of what we know now, we can say that quite a lot of stocking that happened in the past simply was not sensible.

**Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP):** On the shading of rivers, is there a possibility of grants being made available for riparian schemes?

**Dr Armstrong:** At present, the grant schemes do not cover riparian potential in Scotland. That is a key area in which a bit of activity could make a big difference.

**Angus MacDonald:** Is that something that you will look at?

**Dr Armstrong:** Yes.

**Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** Am I correct in understanding that no significant changes will be made to the assessment or methodology until 2021?

**Keith Main:** That is the current plan. We said that we would have a freeze this year and next year. The modelling that we do for the next round will be for the 2022 fishing season. Because of the time that it takes to get the data in, we worked from the 2018 data to inform the 2019 assessment for the 2020 fishing season. In effect, we will have one more year of the model being frozen, which will allow us to do the work and the assessment to bring things together. That is what we told the committee and other stakeholders that we would do a year ago. It allows us some space to develop the models and it allows stakeholders some space and some certainty to allow them to manage their fisheries. I think that I am right in saying that, before we do anything radical to the model, our intention would be to consult boards and trusts on what the next steps should be.

**Rachael Hamilton:** That is reassuring. However, are you confident that the categorisation decisions can be confidently made without the data that you aspire to have?

**Keith Main:** I think that we have the best assessment that is available at present. The methodology has not changed, but the data changes, and we are using the most up-to-date data that we have from the fish counter network and the catch returns that are submitted by angling clubs and individual anglers. We are in the best position that we can be in at present, with the knowledge that we are hoping to develop further.

This is the fifth set of conservation regulations, and we have moved a long way in the five years. We have expanded the model to cover individual rivers as opposed to districts, which the first set of regulations covered. We have added more rivers, improved our knowledge of the fisheries, improved our engagement and increased the percentage of catch returns that we have feeding into the system. More can be done, but we have a good, sound model.

**Rachael Hamilton:** Will you expand on the impact of predation? Some work has been done with the piscivorous bird stomach analysis project, which has resulted in Scottish Natural Heritage issuing four licences. How is that project coming along?

**Dr Armstrong:** The project is progressing well. It should be reported on by the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology in May—it will certainly not be too far into the year. In the 1990s, there was a large assessment of the stomach contents of birds across Scotland, and the aim of this part of the project is to see whether the results will be substantially different from those from that earlier time. The reason why we are doing the work is that fish communities have changed in the intervening period. For example, there are far fewer eels than there used to be, so it might be

that birds are eating more salmonids than they used to.

The other work that is of considerable interest at present is the projects that have been tracking smolts that are moving downstream, using little acoustic transmitters. Some of those projects have suggested that smolt losses are substantial—maybe in the order of 50 per cent—although we do not know how much of that is due to predation and how much is due to the methods that are being used.

We are funding a project that will look at those smolt losses in more detail—not in the coming smolt run, but in 2021—using the smallest possible tags and minimising any impact of catching the fish, which might make them more vulnerable to predation. That project will help us to refine the estimates, and the next step will be to try to find out which predators are consuming the smolts.

If one could increase smolt survival by 50 per cent—obviously, one could not preserve the full 50 per cent—it would counteract the 50 per cent decline in return rates that we have experienced since the 1970s. That illustrates that, if we can find ways to reduce predation, there will be a significant benefit for the overall survival of salmon, so we are particularly interested in that area.

**Rachael Hamilton:** I have a final question on that point. You said that there could be other ways of reducing predation. The current approach is that Scottish Natural Heritage issues licences. What are the other ways? As we gather evidence of specific predation, might we see an increase in the number of licences that are issued? What impact would that have on public perception?

**Dr Armstrong:** That is a very good question. There are ways in which one can reduce predation. For example, we are interested in looking for improved seal scarers that will keep seals out of rivers and therefore stop the overlap between vulnerable prey and the predators. Looking for pinch points where smolts are particularly vulnerable to birds and intensifying scaring in those areas might result in a non-lethal reduction in bird predation levels.

There will be some difficult decisions to be made because, if animals such as Atlantic salmon are dying on the high seas and we want to keep their numbers up, we have a limited number of ways to do that.

**Mark Ruskell:** When you came to the committee last year, we talked about the potential socioeconomic impacts of the regrading of rivers, and you mentioned that Scottish Enterprise was carrying out a study of that. Has it concluded? If so, what were its main conclusions?

**Keith Main:** Scottish Enterprise carried out the study last year. It was not a Scottish Government study or a Marine Scotland study; I understand that it was carried out at the request of the Tweed, Tay, Dee and Spey river managers, who worked with Scottish Enterprise to look at several issues including the economic impacts of the general downturn on fisheries, the rural economy and the wider Scottish economy.

The second part of the study looked at opportunities that fisheries could explore to provide more of an experience around fishing so that, rather than the traditional approach of someone turning up for a week, casting flies into the water every day and going away again on the Saturday afternoon, there would be a greater focus on what the local area and Scotland have to offer.

On the economic impact, the study was a high-level, initial study, and it said—as many such studies say—that there is a lot more work to be done. It said that all sorts of complex issues are giving rise to downturns in angling club membership and the old-fashioned week-long booking of fisheries. To some extent, that is about the gradings of the rivers. The report did not focus on that a great deal, but people come to us and say, “We’re concerned that our river is a grade 3, because some people still want to catch fish.” In fact, in 2018, 93 per cent of rod-caught salmon in Scotland were returned to the river as a matter of course, whether the river was a grade 1, 2 or 3. The vast majority of anglers understand the need to conserve salmon, which is great.

10:00

We also understand that people are more mobile nowadays. Rather than taking a full week at a fishery, they will take a day ticket or a couple of day tickets somewhere and then move on. People can get up in the morning and say over breakfast, “I’m going fishing today—I wonder what the water levels are like on the river?” They can go online and get bang-up-to-the-minute information about fish, flows and so on and, if they do not like it, they can check another river. People can move around. There are lots of different experiences and different reasons for the impacts. The report said that areas that already offer people such day experiences are not seeing the big impacts on the local economy that some of the traditional fisheries are seeing.

There are lessons to be learned. As I said, it was not a Scottish Government report. The fisheries, the rivers, the district salmon fishery boards, the River Tweed Commission and, I am sure, others are looking at the results of the report. It is about striking the right balance between the need to conserve the fish and the need to be

aware of the impacts on the angling clubs, the fisheries and the wider economy. It is a difficult balance to strike.

**Claudia Beamish:** Keith Main's explanation was helpful and reassuring, but our briefing highlights that some angling clubs and individuals still have concerns about not being able to kill salmon. If I understand it correctly, some clubs have said that that has caused a dip in their memberships. Have you put that question to clubs? I am not sure where that information came from but, if that concern is still out there, there is still further education to do.

**Keith Main:** Individual clubs or club secretaries, particularly as part of the stakeholder engagement for the regulations, will write to us and say that they are concerned if their rivers are in the second, third or fourth year of being grade 3 and their membership is falling. I understand that. However, I do not think that the grading will be the sole reason for that fall. In many areas, there is a long-term downward trend in angling club membership, as there is in other areas of life. People do not necessarily sign up for a single river and a single club all year; people travel more and they will fish on day tickets here and there.

We try to respond to that as well as we can, but we have an overriding need to make sure that we can conserve salmon for the long term, and that includes for the long-term future of anglers and fishing in Scotland. We do our best to apply the model and the results consistently and fairly across Scotland. I understand that that means that some smaller rivers and smaller clubs are feeling the pinch, but I am not sure that that is all about our gradings. There are other big reasons for it as well.

**The Convener:** We will move on to the Atlantic salmon strategy.

**Angus MacDonald:** As you know, the Scottish Government's latest programme for government states that it is committed to developing a national wild Atlantic salmon strategy by September this year. What progress has been made on that?

**Dr Antje Branding (Marine Scotland):** The fact that the salmon strategy was part of the programme for government commitments reflects the fact that the protection and enhancement of salmon are a priority for Scotland. Formal stakeholder involvement to develop the strategy will start very soon. I do not want to pre-empt any of the stakeholder engagement discussions, but I can give members a broad overview of the approach.

The strategy will be based around the work of 12 high-level pressure groups, which were identified together with stakeholders last year. It is likely that it will take an outcomes-based approach

in line with the national performance framework. Therefore, any actions that are identified will always relate to specific outcomes.

It is quite clear from today's discussion that we are not starting from zero. We have a wide range of on-going projects and initiatives that are already bearing fruit. Apart from the conservation regulations and the underlying scientific evidence that we are gathering to support that work, there are initiatives in the predator management group, for example, in which the Scottish Government and other stakeholders have come together to look at the issue of predation, which is quite an important aspect.

We are also liaising with scientists, regulators, local biologists and managers on the potential for nutrient additions and oligotrophic regions to support salmon populations. Through the water environment fund, we are providing funding of around £5 million annually towards a large programme of work to increase salmon access to upstream and downstream river habitats. We have also developed the Scottish river temperature monitoring network, which provides a tool to help to prioritise tree planting along rivers where that activity will have the greatest effect on mitigating the rise in river temperatures.

The recent round-table event, which took place in this room on 7 January, was an opportunity to hear more about the pressures that salmon populations face and the wider impact that they have. It is quite clear that research and evidence will play a very important part in developing the strategy, as they can point us to the problems and help us to identify solutions.

The formal stakeholder engagement process in Scotland will start soon. The next North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization annual meeting will take place in Edinburgh in June this year. That reflects the fact that salmon decline is a wider issue, not just a Scottish issue, and that it is pertinent throughout the north Atlantic. It is important that we engage with our international partners to share good practice. The event will be an opportunity to showcase what we are doing in Scotland to protect salmon and engage with our partners.

To sum up, the strategy will aim to draw together all the strands of work that we are undertaking in an accessible format. It will try to identify new areas and will set out our priorities. The important issue of fish counters, for example, has been brought up. By coming together with stakeholders and engaging on the strategy, there is an opportunity to prioritise areas of work—for example, investment in fish counters and how much resource we will deploy to address that issue. It is clear that we need to be careful about how we prioritise that work. It is also clear that

quite a wide range of stakeholders will need to work together on various policy areas to deliver actions to support wild salmon. It will not be a Marine Scotland salmon strategy; it will be a Scottish salmon strategy that will draw out how a wide range of parties will need to come together to protect and enhance Scottish salmon populations.

**Angus MacDonald:** You mentioned the event that is due to be held in Edinburgh. Sir Jim Ratcliffe held a similar event in Iceland last week, given that he is a major landowner in that country. Did Marine Scotland send anyone to that seminar?

**Dr Branding:** No, I am not aware that it did, although I am aware of that meeting.

**Angus MacDonald:** I was just curious. Thank you.

**Rachael Hamilton:** I have another question.

**The Convener:** We have gone 10 minutes over time, so there is only time for a very quick question.

**Rachael Hamilton:** My question is supplementary to Mark Ruskell's question on the socioeconomic impact. When will the three-month study by Scottish Enterprise conclude, and when will the results be available? When will Scottish Enterprise publish that report?

**Keith Main:** I do not know. We have seen a very late draft, and I was under the impression that the report had already been published. However, with my hand on my heart, I could not point you to the report. We can find that out. As I said, it is not a Marine Scotland report; it is a Scottish Enterprise report that was commissioned for the four rivers. I am not quite sure what the position is on comments on that.

**Rachael Hamilton:** I do not have time to ask you a question about this, but something for you to consider is the impact that that consultation will have on your decision making.

**The Convener:** I thank our three witnesses.

10:10

*Meeting suspended.*

10:14

*On resuming—*

## Subordinate Legislation

### Conservation of Salmon (Scotland) Amendment (No 2) Regulations 2019 (SSI 2019/426)

### Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2019 (SSI 2019/427)

**The Convener:** The next item on our agenda is consideration of two negative instruments: the Conservation of Salmon (Scotland) Amendment (No 2) Regulations 2019, and the Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2019. Does any member have any points to raise in relation to the instruments?

**Claudia Beamish:** It is heartening that the science behind the salmon river gradings seems to be more granular. Although there are still concerns about wild salmon, which is an iconic and protected species, it seems that we are in a better place than we were a few years ago—even if not in relation to the whole north Atlantic issue.

10:15

**Rachael Hamilton:** I still feel slightly uncomfortable about it, because I do not feel confident about the socioeconomic impact that it will have, although I completely understand the science and the conservation aspect. There is a real balance to be struck. My nervousness comes about because we do not have all the data or the projected new methodology that will be used after the end of the moratorium. I wonder whether the moratorium might be extended.

**The Convener:** Those points have been noted.

**Mark Ruskell:** I was quite reassured by the evidence and the lack of concern from stakeholders this year. Salmon is a protected species, and we should be restoring its status in Scotland. I am interested in what will sit around the regulations in future, such as the investment in riparian planting and some of the wider ecological work that can be done to restore the status of the species.

I was heartened to hear about the economic impact study, which seemed to show that there are wider issues at play and that it is about not just the status of salmon but the changing nature of the angling industry and its offering, including making licences available on a daily or weekly basis.

I am content with the regulations.

**Finlay Carson:** We now have more confidence in the river gradings than we had in the past. They still seem to be very up and down, but they appear to have more of a scientific basis.

We need to look at the two different issues: the scientific information about preserving the salmon, which is vital, and the impact of the regulations and the river grading on the economy. We might need to consider how the Government can support angling clubs and rivers in the future. If we have a gap and a drop in anglers, we might not have the fishermen there in the future. That is really important.

I look forward to the Scottish Enterprise report, which might need to be part of another piece of committee work.

**The Convener:** Yes—or something that we would want to flag up to our colleagues on the Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee.

Are there any comments on the electricity works regulations?

**Mark Ruskell:** It might be useful to write back to the Scottish Government to get some clarity on multistage consent processes. I would find that useful. The regulations relate to consent processes under sections 36 and 37 of the Electricity Act 1989, but it would be useful to know what multistage consent processes are used across the planning and consent system. It is a complicated area, and it would be good to get some clarity on that.

**The Convener:** We can write to the Scottish Government to get clarity on that point.

Do members agree that we do not want to make any recommendations in relation to the instruments?

**Members indicated agreement.**

**The Convener:** At our next meeting, on 4 February 2020, the committee will hear from Scottish Government officials on the proposed draft Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016 (Register of Persons Holding a Controlled Interest in Land) Regulations 2021. That concludes the committee's business in public today.

10:18

*Meeting continued in private until 11:15.*

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