

RURAL AFFAIRS AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

LETTER FROM CABINET SECRETARY FOR RURAL AFFAIRS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO RAE COMMITTEE REPORT ON REFORM OF THE COMMON FISHERIES POLICY

I read with interest the Committee report into the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy. I am grateful to you and your fellow committee members for the diligent work they have done to provide what I believe to be a useful and well articulated contribution to the discussion. I was also grateful that the committee managed to provide their report in good time to allow me to consider it before finalising the Scottish Government's own response.

I am sure you have read the Scottish Government response which was published on 21 December and that you recognise that it shares many of the views expressed in your own report. As the Committee Report states, it is important that "Scotland speaks – and is seen to be speaking – as much as possible with one voice". I echo that sentiment. I believe that our success in developing improved future fisheries management regimes is dependent on the growing consensus developing between Government, the Parliament and stakeholders.

There are many points in your report that I found myself agreeing with. For example; you correctly recognise that over-simplistic approach by the Commission to overcapacity. You also support a greater role for the industry and other stakeholders in co-managing fisheries

Your report rightly highlights the need to tackle discards and succinctly exposes some of the challenges faced in managing mixed fisheries. I am entirely in agreement that effort regimes hold some promise but must be approached with caution to ensure that they are effective, practicable and do not lead to an undermining of our fisheries resource as a national asset. You may be interested to know that at a recent Scottish Fisheries Council, stakeholders and industry representatives identified the development of new approaches to managing mixed fisheries as a key action under the 4 Pillar plan for fisheries I announced at the annual Fisheries debate in the Scottish Parliament last November. That work is being taken forward as a matter of urgency by my officials, working together with the Scottish Fisheries Council.

I was also pleased to see your strong support for the decentralisation of decision making from the European Institutes to Member States and stakeholders. Our guiding principle in promoting fisheries reform is the return of decision making to Member States.

You share with us the idea of developing a model of regional co-operation to manage fisheries. This is very much in line with the arguments we have been pushing within the UK and across Europe. The questions you raise regarding membership of a regional body and the integration of a regional approach with

negotiations involving 3rd countries such as Norway are pertinent and well made.

It is important we develop a model which helps address these and other points; for example, how would wide ranging stocks such as mackerel fit within a regional structure? You will be aware that this issue is being pursued by the independent Inquiry into Future Fisheries Management which I established last year. The Panel provided an influential interim report last year which began to sketch out a regional model. Its final report will be published this spring and will develop this model further. In the meantime, my officials continue to pursue and garner support for the approaches developed in the Scottish Government response.

Thank you again for your efforts. I have asked officials to keep the Committee informed of developments as the CFP reform debate continues and I look forward to working with you to promote Scotland's interests in the future development of sustainable fisheries management.

Richard Lochhead
26 January 2010