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12 December 2016

Dear Hugh,

I note the Cabinet Secretary's decision to allow the beaver populations in Argyll and Tayside to remain and receive legal protection. As you are aware, we remain concerned about the potential impacts of beavers on migratory fish populations. You are also aware that the need for a beaver management plan, which took appropriate account of the needs of fish and fisheries, was a key recommendation of the Beaver Salmon Working Group. It is therefore disappointing that there was no mention of the work of the BSWG in the Scottish Government news release.

The announcement raises a number of questions for the fisheries management sector and I would like to explore these with you in more detail.

- What progress has been made on developing a beaver management plan?
- What is the process for developing a beaver management plan, and what are the opportunities for Fisheries Management Scotland to contribute to, or comment on, the plan?
- What advice will be available to District Salmon Fishery Boards and Fisheries Trusts in mitigating beaver activity and reporting sightings of illegally released beavers?
- Would it be correct to conclude that the references to 'beaver populations in Argyll and Tayside can remain' and 'beavers will be allowed to expand their range naturally' means that no further licensed reintroductions will take place in the short to medium term? I note that some organisations are already calling for further releases.
- Can you confirm that illegally released beavers would have no legal protection, and indeed that the focus of the management plan will be to remove such beavers from the wild?

I note the emphasis in the Scottish Government's news release on illegal releases of beavers. I would emphasise that the DSFBs and Fisheries Trusts have a network of staff working around rivers across Scotland and it would be possible for water bailiffs and fisheries biologists, given adequate guidance, to report signs of beaver activity out with the natural range of the Argyll and Tayside populations. As we have stated previously, we also consider that Scottish Ministers should use their powers under the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 to ensure that all captive beavers in private collections are adequately chipped, tested for disease and securely enclosed as a condition of ownership.

Finally, Fisheries Management Scotland appreciate the complexity of the decision and the competing views and interests which need to be considered. Fisheries Management Scotland, and our member DSFBs and Fishery Trusts, remain willing to contribute to the process and I hope that we can fully engage in the preparation and delivery of a competent beaver management plan for Scotland.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Alan Wells".

Dr Alan Wells  
CEO Fisheries Management Scotland

Cc Kerrie Campbell  
Cc Simon Dryden