

Response ID ANON-VB35-UVA5-1

Submitted to **Developing an Environment Strategy for Scotland**

Submitted on **2018-08-24 16:46:01**

Questions

1 What are your views on the following draft vision for Scotland's environment and climate change policies?

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General Comments

Fisheries Management Scotland is the representative body for the District Salmon Fishery Boards, the River Tweed Commission and the Rivers and Fisheries Trusts in Scotland. We work to promote and ensure the best fisheries management for the protection, preservation, and development of Scotland's wild salmon and freshwater fish, along with their fisheries and the wider environment.

Fisheries Management Scotland welcomes the publication of the discussion paper on a new environmental strategy for Scotland. Whilst we are largely supportive of the proposed vision and outcomes, in the absence of a clear, integrated and unambiguous strategy for the delivery of these outcomes, we are of the view that the strategy will not live up to expectation.

Our freshwater and migratory fish populations are under pressure, particularly during the marine phase of the life cycle of migratory fish. For example, within the last 50 years, marine survival of Atlantic salmon has decreased from a situation where around 25 adult fish returned to Scotland for every 100 juveniles (smolts) leaving our rivers, to the current situation where less than 5 adults now return. The reasons for this decline are many and varied, but many of the pressures on these fish populations could be managed by existing regulatory regimes. Within freshwater, our native species face a range of anthropomorphic pressures which impact on water quality, quantity and accessibility. Concerted and coordinated action across Government and Agencies, including achieving a balance between fish and other protected species will be necessary. Unless environmental protection underpins all decision making, to a much greater extent than has been the case to date, we are concerned that the strategy will not deliver for our iconic fish species.

There are a number of areas of Scottish Government policy that have the potential to compromise the delivery of good environmental outcomes, and it is important that the strategy addresses these issues satisfactorily. Some examples are included below – we are very happy to provide more detail on these as required:

Scottish Government targets for commercial forestry and targets for peatland restoration. Whilst we are aware that new planting should not occur on peat with a depth of over 0.5m, this policy position does not cover replanting of trees in existing areas of deep peat. It is not acceptable to undertake re-planting, in a manner that would not be considered appropriate for new forestry planting, but continual re-planting appears to be the expectation within the current framework.

Beaver reintroductions. We remain concerned that the reintroduction of beavers has the potential to exacerbate the current situation for Atlantic salmon and sea trout. Further delays to migration (both upstream and downstream), when considered in addition to the existing barriers and pressures in the freshwater environment have the potential to disrupt an already crucial part of the life cycle of these iconic fish species. Appropriate management tools, particularly in relation to dams is key.

Marine Developments and Marine Protected Areas. The success or failure of our network of marine protected areas is entirely dependent on the management measures associated with the sites being suitably robust to ensure that the protected features thrive. We are not convinced that this is currently the case, particularly with regard to commercial fishing activity. We are also extremely concerned about a recent application for the mechanical dredging of kelp – which is a priority marine feature. In addition, both Atlantic salmon and sea trout are priority marine features, but we do not consider that such mobile species, which cannot currently receive site-based protection, are adequately protected from the impacts of marine developments.

Question 1:

We support the draft vision. However, this is predicated on a robust assessment of what the environmental limits actually are for any given activity, which is not currently the case across a range of policy areas. As an example, Scottish Government support (through the National Marine Plan) the 2020 growth targets of the salmon aquaculture industry. The growth ambitions of the industry to 2030 are also referenced across a number of Scottish Government policy and strategy documents, but no assessment of the environmental carrying capacity for increased growth has been undertaken. Living within environmental limits should underpin not just the environment strategy, but all elements of Scottish Government policy.

We are of the view that the Regulatory Reform (Scotland) Act 2014 has blurred the lines between sustainable development and 'sustainable economic growth' and we believe that the Regulators' duty included in s4 is inconsistent with the proposed environment strategy. We receive regular reports from our members of local situations where economic considerations appear to outweigh environmental concerns or impacts and we are strongly of the view that the regulators' duty should be removed from primary legislation.

We would emphasise that the guiding principles of the UK sustainable development strategy make clear that the goals of sustainable development are living within environmental limits and ensuring a strong, healthy and just society, and that these goals will be delivered by means of a sustainable economy, good governance and sound science. This is quite different from considering these five to have equal weight in decision making.

We seek further clarity on how other policies, such as the Scotland's 2015 Economic strategy, which seeks to increase sustainable economic growth, will integrate with the environmental strategy. We remain unclear on exactly what 'sustainable economic growth' actually means, and we are strongly of the view that sustainable development, as set out in the UK sustainable development strategy should be the basis for Scottish Government policy, including the economic strategy.

2 What are your views on the following draft outcomes that will help to achieve this vision?

What are your views on the following draft outcomes that will help to achieve this vision?:

Fisheries Management Scotland support these draft outcomes, in particular the emphasis on protecting biodiversity and supporting healthy ecosystems. Restoration and recovery of species and the habitats on which they depend is a key aspect of the work of the fisheries management community. However, development of this strategy is only the first stage, and a clear delivery plan is also necessary. Protection of biodiversity, particularly against a background of developments which have the potential to increase between-species interactions (such as increased predation at weirs, arising from fish movement being delayed), can be challenging. A clear policy for the management of such interactions between protected species will be necessary, in the acknowledgement that the impacts of such developments will never be completely eliminated.

Poaching of freshwater and migratory fish is recognised as a wildlife crime, but the offences and associated penalties included in the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries (Consolidation) Act 2003 (as amended) are significantly lower than other wildlife crimes. Recent annual reports of wildlife crime in Scotland highlight that fish poaching: is the single highest category of recorded wildlife crime; comprises the single highest caseload for COPFS; has a higher overall conviction rate than other categories; has the lowest average monetary fine across all 9 categories of wildlife crime. The current level of fines has the potential to lead to a perception that fisheries offences are less serious than other forms of wildlife crime and therefore we support the recommendations of the 2015 Wildlife Crime Penalties Review, to raise the maximum available penalties and custodial sentences, at least for the most serious offences.

3 What are your views on the draft knowledge accounts which will be used to help identify priorities for action in the coming years? What additional sources of key evidence can you add?

What are your views on the draft knowledge accounts [LINK] which will be used to help identify priorities for action in the coming years? What additional sources of key evidence can you add?:

We welcome the addition of these knowledge accounts, but we note that they do not appear to have been developed on a consistent basis. Given the existence of the National Marine Plan we are surprised that a specific knowledge account for marine issues is not included. The National Marine Plan identifies two significant and widespread pressures on the Scottish marine environment – climate change and impacts of mobile fishing gear on the seabed. The impacts of mobile fishing gear on benthic habitats, in particular, is directly under human control, and will doubtless have had an impact on our sea trout populations.

The 'Ecosystems and wildlife' knowledge account focusses on the terrestrial environment but does recognise that there are clear linkages with the health of our marine environment. This is particularly the case for migratory fish species, which rely on both the freshwater and marine environment to complete their life cycles. Despite the freshwater environment either being stable or improving in recent years (Page 2 of the ecosystem and wildlife knowledge account), the numbers of salmon and sea trout returning from the marine environment is in decline. Much greater integration of measures to improve ecosystem health will be required in future, particularly in relation to developments that the Scottish Ministers or agencies consent. Without such integration across policy areas, it is unlikely that the environment strategy will deliver for our iconic freshwater and migratory fish species, or the habitats on which they depend.

About you

What is your name?

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Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?

Organisation

What is your organisation?

Organisation:

Fisheries Management Scotland

The Scottish Government would like your permission to publish your response. Please indicate your publishing preference:

Publish response only (without name)

We will share your response internally with other Scottish Government policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Government to contact you again in relation to this exercise?

Yes

Evaluation

Please help us improve our consultations by answering the questions below. (Responses to the evaluation will not be published.)

Matrix 1 - How satisfied were you with this exercise?:

Slightly dissatisfied

Please enter comments here.:

It is important for Organisations to be able to make general comments as part of these consultations. Citizen Space, as designed for this consultation does not allow this.

Matrix 1 - How would you rate your satisfaction with using this platform (Citizen Space) to respond to this exercise?:

Slightly dissatisfied

Please enter comments here.:

See above