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Our ref: 2018/0044593

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Dear Mr Firth

Urgent Need to Recover Our Coastal Waters

Thank you for your letter of 17th December addressed to the First Minister copied to Fergus Ewing, Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy and other Ministers. I have been asked to respond as the issues raised within your correspondence fall within the remit of my team.

First and foremost I would like to be clear that the Scottish Government takes the enforcement of fisheries management and protection of the wider marine environment seriously.

In order to achieve this Marine Scotland Compliance deploys a range of assets, including three marine protection vessels, regular rigid hulled inflatable boat (RHIB) patrols in inshore waters, have two surveillance aircraft and make use of unmanned aerial drones. Complemented by Marine Scotland Compliance Officers deployed around the coast, all aiming to ensure high levels of compliance with fisheries and environmental regulations.


From a policy perspective, Marine Scotland continues to strengthen the objectives of the Inshore Fisheries Strategy from 2015 (improving the evidence base on which fisheries management decisions are made; streamlining fisheries governance and promoting stakeholder participation; embedding inshore fisheries management into wider marine planning) through the deployment of new technology on vessels. We believe this will significantly improve fisheries management and protect the marine environment.

That is why at the Inshore Fisheries Conference in October last year, the Cabinet Secretary announced a £1.5 million investment in fishing vessel tracking and monitoring technology. This two year programme of work will help deliver a step change in fisheries management; one that I'm sure many organisations noted in your letter will welcome. In order to be effective any technology deployed needs to be tamper-proof and appropriate to the operation of individual vessels.

Your letter covers a number of important matters. It is also timely and relevant, with the Scottish Government shortly publishing a national discussion paper on the Future of Fisheries Management in Scotland. This paper will mark the start of a period of discussion with stakeholders to explore a range of ideas and suggestions on how we might adjust our management approach in the future.

The Scottish Government is seeking to develop a world class fisheries management system for Scottish waters, and want this initiative to tap into the wealth of knowledge held by all our stakeholders. I would therefore welcome yours and the views of the signatories to your letter once the paper is launched.

Yours sincerely



Jim Watson
Head of Domestic Fisheries Management