**Developing a catching policy to deliver sustainable fisheries management in Scotland – 10 minute statement**

**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

Presiding Officer, Scotland’s seas are wonderfully rich and diverse, reflected in the abundance of wildlife we see and the benefits we all enjoy – be it through the delicious, healthy seafood we eat, the jobs supported, or the coastal communities which reap the benefits from having this fantastic natural asset on their doorsteps.

With such diversity and abundance comes great responsibility. The sheer breadth of human activity at sea inevitably brings impacts for the marine environment. It is incumbent on us all to understand, manage, mitigate and reduce those impacts in order to secure our natural resources for generations to come.

A key part of this is ensuring that fishing activity within Scottish waters is operating sustainably and responsibly.

This commitment to sustainable fisheries management is locked into our overarching Fisheries Management Strategy and will drive many of the new policies and management improvements planned over the period to 2030.

But it is also important to acknowledge the socio-economic importance of fishing and that the last year has not been easy for many in the fishing industry.

We have seen significant ongoing economic challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and many businesses and individuals are continuing to feel the devastating impacts from the UK’s exit from the European Union – and will continue to do so.

I am proud that the Scottish Government has been able to support the fishing industry during this period; through the provision of hardship funding and support towards a more resilient and safe future, for example with targeted funding for the Nephrops sector, investment in safety improvements and training, and helping young fishers to enter the sector.

This support must go further still, as we work with the fishing industry and the wider fisheries stakeholder community, including other UK fisheries administrations and international partners, to adapt to the changing strategic and operating environment and to deliver a just transition towards a more sustainable future.

The signing of the Bute House Agreement in August last year means the spotlight is now, more than ever, on the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss, which requires urgent action in order to deliver change on a significant and long-lasting scale.

In our current Programme for Government, we committed to publishing our approach to the Blue Economy through an action plan.

This recognises the importance of Scotland’s marine space and marine sectors as national assets, that are critical to meeting our ambitions for sustainable stewardship of the marine environment.

The action plan will be underpinned by a Vision and will provide a framing and ambition for Scotland’s marine management policies, strategies and plans, including the Fisheries Management Strategy.

Our vision for Scotland’s Blue Economy is clear that the actions required to sustainably steward our marine environment cannot be delivered in isolation. We have a strong tradition of co-management within Scotland, working with our fisheries stakeholders to respond to topical and difficult issues.

By working in partnership through our co-management groups, I am confident that we can deliver the best outcomes for Scotland’s marine environment, our seafood sector and coastal communities.

The 12 actions underpinning our Fisheries Management Strategy are important building blocks to deliver these outcomes. Our initial actions will be prioritised around the environment, recognising the scale of change needed, and to help tackle some of our most difficult fisheries management challenges.

Today sees significant progress on two key actions.

Presiding Officer, I am delighted to announce that we are publishing Scotland’s draft future catching policy this afternoon.

The introduction of the landing obligation as part of the Common Fisheries Policy aimed to tackle the widespread, damaging and unacceptable issue of discarding across the EU. Scotland played a key role in shaping this ‘discard ban’ whilst part of the EU and we remain fully committed to the principles underpinning the current regulations.

However, we and our stakeholders – including fishing and environmental groups – acknowledge that there have been issues with implementation and the policy is not as effective as it could be.

The Future Catching Policy seeks to change this. By proposing a different approach, working closely with stakeholders, we will ensure the right management measures are in place to support pragmatic decision making.

The consultation will test a number of the main components in the Future Catching Policy:

* Firstly, working in partnership with fishers, scientists, and environmental groups, we aim to put in place additional technical and spatial management measures to reduce catches of unwanted fish. This might include increased net selectivity or spawning stock area closures.
* Secondly, we will help the fishing industry avoid bycatch of sensitive marine species such as seabirds, seals and cetaceans. No fisher wants to catch these species and we must work together to preserve them in the wider ecosystem.
* Thirdly, we will take a pragmatic approach by considering different ‘fleet segments’ - avoiding the one-size-fits-all approach which we know doesn’t work in mixed fisheries with varied management issues.
* Fourthly, we intend to adjust current rules around discarding to simplify where required, and ensure that rules can be and are complied with, and
* Finally, we recognise that increasing pressure on available marine space is creating tensions between some parts of the fishing fleet and seek views on additional management measures that may be required for the creel, gillnet and longline fisheries.

These measures will enable Scotland to deliver on the high level goals we have jointly agreed with other UK administrations within the UK Joint Fisheries Statement and Fisheries Framework.

This approach is a practical demonstration of how this government aims to manage fisheries in the future - working in partnership to agree common goals, with the details of the implementation left to our administration to take forward given our own unique circumstances, thus avoiding an ill-fitting ‘one-size-fits-all’ single UK fisheries policy.

Presiding Officer, the Scottish Government is committed to being a world-leader in fisheries management.

We take our role as guardian of Scotland’s natural marine environment seriously.

The Future Catching Policy will build on our current approach, signalling a step change in the way in which unsustainable fishing practices are tackled.

We hope to share learning with our UK and International fisheries partners, demonstrating leadership and supporting others to deliver the right outcomes for our shared fish stocks, our fishing industries, and our local communities.

To be clear, for both the Future Catching Policy and Remote Electronic Monitoring, all rules and regulations will be applied on a level playing basis, to Scottish vessels and non-Scottish vessels fishing in Scottish waters.

Remote Electronic Monitoring – or REM as it is usually known - adds a crucial layer to the Future Catching Policy and is fundamental to the success of our wider Strategy, ensuring that we are fishing sustainably, and also delivering accountability and confidence.

This morning, I published a consultation on the implementation of Remote Electronic Monitoring to key parts of the fishing fleet.

There is no doubt that Scotland’s fishers produce a high quality product that many of us enjoy. But we must have confidence that fish stocks are being fished sustainably and responsibly. Many fishers understand this and have taken positive steps to respond.

But given the remote nature of fishing operations, it can often be difficult to demonstrate compliance and to deliver the confidence we need. Technology can help us, and it’s right that we embrace it.

Many fishers recognise this already. This is substantiated by the rise in uptake of voluntary REM installations on active Scottish scallop dredge boats since COVID restrictions started to ease.

Over 80% of our active over 10 metre scallop dredge fleet now carry REM onboard – which in this case includes cameras. This is a significant achievement.

The consultation on REM confirms this Government’s commitment to introduce mandatory REM onboard all scallop dredge and large pelagic vessels operating in Scottish waters. Subject to parliamentary time and approval, we aim to have the legislation in place by the end of 2022 to do this.

The consultation seeks views on key aspects of implementation and also on appropriate wider deployment to other parts of the fishing fleet.

REM will enhance the baseline commitment made in the Bute House Agreement for all fishing vessels to be fitted with vessel tracking equipment by the end of this parliamentary term.

REM places an enhanced and independent level of monitoring on board, for example by using cameras, sensors and GPS so that we can determine fishing activity taking place.

In line with our commitment to proportionality cameras won’t be needed in every case – REM can be adapted depending on the need. This is simple but effective technology, that will demonstrate Scotland’s leading approach to making best use of cutting-edge management tools.

REM will deliver on three main outcomes:

* Firstly, it will enhance our knowledge of fisheries, through the gathering of spatially rich scientific data, allowing for better decision-making.
* Secondly, it will deliver confidence and accountability in fishing practices, demonstrating that fishing activity is sustainable and lawful.
* And thirdly it will improve the resilience of existing data collection processes, providing uninterrupted data collection regardless of external factors – including COVID.

Presiding Officer, I hope my colleagues from around the chamber will support the policies outlined here today and look forward to hearing their views as we progress with the development and implementation of our broader Fisheries Management Strategy.

I also encourage all with an interest to access and respond to the consultations announced today.

By publishing a future catching policy for Scotland and our proposals to require remote electronic monitoring by key parts of our fishing fleet, we are demonstrating Scotland’s leadership in fisheries management both here on these islands and internationally.

We are cementing our credentials as responsible and sustainable fisheries managers, and signalling to all fishing vessels operating in Scottish waters that we can and must do better in order to protect and enhance our fantastic marine environment, for now and the future.

By doing so, we will help to deliver a sustainable future for our fishers, our seafood industry and our coastal communities too.

**1690 words – 10 minutes at 170 words a minute.**