



Mairi Gougeon MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands

Gillian Martin MSP
Acting Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Energy



12th March 2025

Dear Cabinet Secretaries Gougeon & Martin,

SEPA – Licence appeals relating to the Sea Lice Risk Framework (SLRF)

Thank you for the meeting you hosted in the Scottish Parliament on 5th February. As we explained, Scotland's production companies have and will continue to engage with Scotland's environmental regulator over the appropriate and proportionate implementation of your policy position. Namely a planning tool for local authorities that provides advice on the interaction between our sector and wild salmon. We remain committed to your policy objective. Thank you for your helpful proposal that the Government's Chief Scientific Advisor (Marine) will engage with companies over the science underpinning SEPAs approach. These meetings are now being set up.

As we explained on 5th February, SEPAs continual ratchet of SLRF, without any basis in evidence, and the resulting impacts on commercial businesses and their fish, is unacceptable. Prior to Christmas, SEPA began the process of introducing variations to farm environmental licences to support their implementation of SLRF. There are significant and fundamental issues with these variations. Given the scale and magnitude of our concerns, farming businesses were left with no alternative but to appeal the variation notices. We regret having to take this position.

The appeals in no way affect our sector's commitments around farmed and wild fish interactions, nor our businesses investment in lice management. We continue to operate to all existing agreements and legal obligations in relation to lice management and potential interactions. Our sector will continue to operate to (and be bound by) existing Environmental Management Plans (EMPs), which form a condition of farm planning permission. These will be in place until their obligations are formally transferred to SEPA. We will also continue to operate in full compliance with all regulations relating to sea lice, as enforced by the Fish



Health Inspectorate (including monitoring and reporting requirements, and the current “action” threshold).

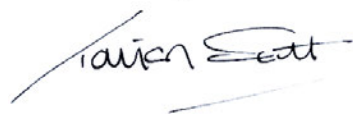
Further, all salmon farms continue to operate in compliance with the sector’s Code of Good Practice, which includes controls around lice management, including those that are specifically designed around wild salmonid interactions. Alongside the Code, salmon farmers also operate to other third-party standards, which can include lice management requirements.

As you know, we recently updated Parliament’s Rural Affairs and Islands Committee that the sector has invested nearly £1billion on infrastructure and resources to improve fish health and welfare since 2018. This includes significant investment in measures to manage sea lice. As a result, our sector currently records the lowest lice figures since detailed records were first published. Annual lice averages since 2018 have been 0.46 (2018), 0.54 (2019), 0.52 (2020), 0.61 (2021), 0.49 (2022), 0.46 (2023), and 0.42 (2024).

We also note no progress as yet on a business impact assessment, which was raised with the Deputy First Minister in the meeting she held with Salmon Scotland Board members on 14th November. This was referenced by the First Minister in his letter of 10th December. As we understand, the implementation of a government policy by a regulator must be subject to a Business and Regulatory Impact Assessment (BRIA). The assessment provided by SEPA in their response to the second SLRF consultation falls significantly short on what any stakeholder might expect and cannot be considered an appropriate BRIA to accompany the implementation of such a significant policy. Further, we cannot see how SEPA can be left responsible for completing the BRIA, given their lack of business or commercial knowledge. We would reiterate the point made to the DFM – that this assessment must be undertaken out with SEPA.

You also may wish to note that Salmon Scotland’s Chair wrote to the SEPA Chair on 14th January inviting the SEPA Board to meet on this important matter. We have been told there will be no substantive reply until April.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tavish Scott". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Tavish Scott
Chief Executive, Salmon Scotland