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I wish to update you on the outcome of the Local Inquiry relating to Natural Resources Wales' (NRW) proposed Wales Rod and Line (Salmon and Sea Trout) Byelaws 2017 and the Wales Net Fishing (Salmon and Sea Trout) Byelaws 2017. The Planning Inspectorate concluded the Inquiry and presented a report with recommendations to me on 3 June. Having carefully reflected on all the evidence and arguments put forward on all sides, the inspector considers the proposed byelaws to be a measured response to declining fish stocks in Wales. Accordingly he found them to be necessary, proportionate and reasonable in view of Salmon and Sea Trout stocks throughout Wales. His recommendation was to confirm the byelaws.

Given the Inspector's full report and his recommendations, along with the updated HRAs, I am also clear the Byelaws are needed. I have decided to confirm the Byelaws to come into force on 1 January 2020. I am aware they will need to be amended slightly to reflect some typos and date changes, which your officers have already identified.

In addition, the Inspector's report highlighted to me the need to consider the factors which affect the survival of Salmon and Sea Trout in a holistic manner. Angling is only one of the many interventions which impact on the decline in Salmon and Sea Trout stocks and this needs to be considered alongside other issues such as pollution, obstructions to migration, water abstraction, robust enforcement activity and piscivorous predation.

I recognise the significant amount of work NRW already carry out in relation to these matters and these are reflected in the assessments and working with the Environment Agency and Cefas to submit reports to ICES and NASCO. However, this work is not necessarily translated into an accessible format for stakeholders. It would be fair to say it is not always easy to find this information all in one place and presented in a way which is relevant and specific to Welsh anglers.

I know from my discussions with you, you are aware of how important it is to engage with stakeholders from the outset. There is now an opportunity to revisit NRW's relationship with anglers and consider how it could be reset to allow for better co-operation and collaboration towards the common goal of reversing the decline of Salmon and Sea Trout stocks in Welsh waters. I am, therefore, asking you to take the lead on a Welsh specific Plan of Action for the protection of Salmon and Sea Trout, working with stakeholders. The Plan will need to pull together all the current work being taken forward by all relevant parties, as well as identify the gaps and actions to address these. I ask you to look in particular at the issues raised at the Inquiry. My officials will work with you to contribute to this, as I hope will anglers and supporters of angling, as well as others, with an interest in this issue.

As an example, the impact of agricultural pollution was raised as a major concern during the Inquiry. You may recall my announcement last November to introduce regulations to tackle agricultural pollution. The proposed regulations are expected to come into force in January 2020 and will provide greater protection for water quality from excessive nutrients. Furthermore, these regulations will align with the 'All Wales' byelaws.

I will expect you to publish the plan of action, with a concerted effort to share with anglers and other interested parties, before the byelaws come into force on 1 January 2020. It will be for you to decide which format this will take to reach the required audience.

I have issued a Written Statement today to inform Assembly Members and all interested parties of my final decision, together with the Inspector's report.

I would like to thank you and your officers for the continued engagement throughout the Inquiry as well as the urgent work on the updated HRAs. I appreciate all the hard work NRW does and recognise this has not been an easy time for you and your officers. Calling for a Local Inquiry was not a decision taken lightly, however, it was necessary and many lessons have been learnt. I believe with effective, meaningful and collaborative engagement going forward such a situation can be avoided in the future.

Lesley Griffiths AC/AM

Gweinidog yr Amgylchedd, Ynni a Materion Gwledig
Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs