

T: 0300 244 4000  
E: [scottish.ministers@gov.scot](mailto:scottish.ministers@gov.scot)

Finlay Carson MSP  
Convener  
Rural Affairs and Islands Committee  
[rural.committee@parliament.scot](mailto:rural.committee@parliament.scot)

26 February 2026

Dear Finlay,

Following the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee (RAIC) meeting on 11 February 2026, I am writing to update the Committee on actions the Scottish Government is taking in response to the recommendation to annul the *Sea Fish (Prohibition on Fishing) (Firth of Clyde) Order 2026*. As you are aware, Ministers took the decision to revoke the Order with effect from 18 February 2026.

At the Committee meeting, I made clear that it would be unacceptable to leave a depleted cod stock without appropriate safeguards. Given Ministers' statutory obligations, including under the *Fisheries Act 2020*, and noting the points made at the RAIC evidence session, taking no action is not an option.

My officials have therefore developed an alternative approach that continues to pursue the policy objective of supporting cod recovery, while balancing our environmental and socioeconomic duties. Throughout this process, officials have maintained constructive engagement with local fishers, including in the design of the supporting science programme. I would now like to set out the package of measures that will take effect from 28 February.

1 - Access controls: Administrative licence conditions will be introduced to limit access to the wider Firth of Clyde. Access will be restricted to:

- vessels with a valid track record of fishing in the area during 2023–2025, and
- vessels engaged primarily in authorised scientific research.

These controls replicate the access provisions contained in the revoked Order (and were not a point of concern raised by the RAIC). They are required in order to maintain the integrity of the scientific programme and prevent displacement from visiting vessels (and thereby potential increases in fishing mortality). Officials will work closely with other UK Fisheries Administrations to ensure consistent implementation of these conditions.

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See [www.lobbying.scot](http://www.lobbying.scot)

## 2 - Seasonal Closure (Voluntary)

I recognise the strength of feeling expressed regarding the proposed precautionary seasonal closure. While regrettable given the condition of the stock, I have reflected carefully on the points raised, and following further engagement with local fishers, have decided to move forward with a voluntary seasonal closure. This will cover both static and mobile gears and initially run from 28 February to 1 April 2026. The voluntary closure will apply to the same area set out in the revoked Order.

Participating vessels will be asked to limit fishing activity and, where requested, carry monitoring equipment to support improved data collection on bycatch and stock behaviour. Early discussion with the Clyde Fishermen's Association has been positive, and they have indicated support for such a closure linked to an enhanced science programme. This arrangement will be kept under review and discussed with the Working Group later this year.

## 3 - Science Programme

The science programme will proceed as planned and run in parallel with the measures above. The Working Group—comprising fishers, scientists, and officials—has already held its inception meeting and will meet at least twice annually.

Key priorities for Year 1 include:

- expanding Q1 and Q4 research-vessel survey coverage;
- monitoring of selectivity and bycatch across gear types, including creels and *Nephrops* trawls;
- addressing gaps in historical data within the stock assessment model, and updating the model to include data to 2025;
- improving understanding of the spatial and temporal distribution of cod (including spawning cod and juveniles), with an initial focus on the Clyde Cod Box and adjacent areas.

In addition to the above three elements concerns were raised at the evidence session regarding bycatch and fishing mortality. I wish to note that the Scottish Government has now launched a 12-week public consultation on selectivity proposals under the Future Catching Policy, running from 16 February to 11 May 2026.

My officials will continue to work closely with the local fishing industry, and I would like to record my gratitude for the constructive approach the industry has taken in helping shape the science programme and wider evidence-based work.

As previously indicated, I intend to provide the RAIC with an annual progress report on this programme in the Clyde and the associated management measures.

I trust this update is helpful.



**MAIRI GOUGEON**

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See [www.lobbying.scot](http://www.lobbying.scot)

St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG  
[www.gov.scot](http://www.gov.scot)

**INVESTORS IN PEOPLE**<sup>™</sup>  
We invest in people Silver

