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02 February 2024

Dear Charlina

Further to our exchange of letters in July and August 2023, I wanted to take the opportunity to follow up on the outcome of the Scottish Government's recent consultation on proposals to close fishing for sandeel in all Scottish waters. I also wanted to assure you that the points raised in your letter of 1 August 2023 were given full consideration by officials alongside all responses and representations received.

Following a detailed analysis of all responses and representations received and consideration of the ICES forage fish advice, I announced in the Scottish Parliament today that the Scottish Government will be prohibiting fishing for sandeel in all Scottish waters (pending parliamentary approval). While I appreciate that this news will be disappointing to some EU members, I believe that it is critical that we manage our marine environment in a such a way as to ensure its sustainable use, protecting biodiversity and ensuring healthy functioning ecosystems. Prohibiting all vessels from fishing for sandeel in Scottish waters will help provide long term sustainability and resilience to the marine ecosystem as well as bringing about potential benefits not just for sandeel but also for seabirds, marine mammals and other fish species. The decision reflects the overwhelming support for our proposals from respondents to our consultation, and our longstanding position not to support fishing for sandeel in Scotland as set out in Scotland's Future Fisheries Management Strategy.

In your letter you made reference to the commitment by the EU and UK (paragraph 6 of the Written Record of fisheries consultation regarding sandeel in 2023) to seek further information from ICES on ecosystem considerations in the provision of single-stock advice for forage fish species. This advice was published on 28 November 2023 and we made sure that it formed part of the scientific evidence base that was used to inform the Scottish Government's decision-making on this issue.

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In reaching this decision, the Scottish Government has applied the precautionary principle to its decision making and has ensured that we are fully aligned with our national and international commitments, which includes the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) to which you refer in your letter of 1 August 2023. It is hoped that this decision will contribute towards the achievement of Good Environmental Status for biodiversity and commercial fish under the UK Marine Strategy, an obligation that stems from the EU's Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

The Sandeel (Prohibition Of Fishing) (Scotland) Order 2024 will come into force on 26 March 2024 pending approval by the Scottish Parliament. The Order will cover the Scottish zone which includes all internal waters, territorial sea and that part of the UK's EEZ adjacent to Scotland. The Order will also apply to all vessels fishing in these waters. The associated documents will be published on the Scottish Government webpages later today.

I fully appreciate that this is not the outcome that the European Commission and its members would have wished. However, I hope that we both agree on the importance of managing our marine environment in such a way as to ensure its sustainable use, while also protecting biodiversity and ensuring healthy functioning ecosystems.

As a key partner and neighbour to Scotland, I look forward to continuing to build on the longstanding and constructive dialogues that we have had over the years as we look to the future.

Yours Sincerely,



MAIRI GOUGEON

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