
Mark Pont, Assessment Programme Lead

Roger Halliday
Chief Statistician and Data Officer
Scottish Government
(by email)

12 February 2019

Dear Roger

STATISTICS ON SCOTTISH SEA FISHERIES

As you are aware, we recently completed a compliance check review of Scottish Government's [Scottish Sea Fisheries statistics](#), I am pleased to confirm the continued designation of Scottish Sea Fisheries statistics as National Statistics, subject to your team delivering the outcomes that it seeks from its [current development programme](#). Our Agriculture and Environment Domain Lead, Job de Roij, has agreed with your team that they will continue to engage with each other on progress over the coming months.

The Scottish Sea Fisheries statistics provide an important oversight of an industry that is key to the economy and society in Scotland. We have been very encouraged by the ambition for these statistics communicated by your relatively new team, under the leadership of Alastair McAlpine. We look forward to seeing how the statistics develop, particularly in respect of increasing their value by seeking to understand and better answer users' questions about the industry.

We welcome the recent developments that the team has implemented:

- Launch of on-line consultation, supported by face-to-face workshops and engagement activities, to understand what different types of users want from the statistics and to start to share proposals for improvements.
- Development of 'topic sheets' as a new way to provide analysis and insight on specific issues or questions of interest to users of the statistics.
- Responding positively to feedback on the statistics publication provided by the GSS Good Practice Team, for example, starting to add more insight and context around the statistics while streamlining the content to make it more accessible. Your team has confirmed that more substantive changes will follow the consultation.
- Improved communication for users about the data sources, processes, assurance arrangements, and the impact of any limitations on the statistics, supported by a helpful diagram illustrating the flow of the data.
- Planned exit of the UK from the EU and the Common Fisheries Policy: We appreciate that fisheries is politically sensitive and that until the future policy and legal framework for the UK and Scotland is clear, it would be premature and unhelpful for your statisticians to be engaging publicly around the implications for the Sea Fisheries statistics. However, it was reassuring to hear from your team that they are engaged with key operational partners and are planning for different potential scenarios to ensure continued provision of high quality statistics. Your team told us that it is actively considering how it will disseminate information to users as soon as the future arrangements for the statistics are confirmed, including if there is no anticipated change.

Our review identified further areas for improvement and your team was honest and open in its appraisal of the current strengths and limitations of the statistics. We were pleased to hear that several of the key points we made already feature in the development plans, and that our findings

can be used together with the outcomes of the current consultation to inform the direction of travel. We would see priorities as:

- Understanding and engaging with the range of users for these statistics and associated data, making efforts to reach out to those who you are not in regular contact with, and using the intelligence gathered to present a package that can meet as far as possible the needs (in form and content) of the different audiences. Sharing what you learn about the different applications of the statistics and data would also provide helpful context for users.
- Continuing to move away from providing lengthy descriptive commentary towards providing insight for users of the statistics – providing the evidence base and narrative to help users answer the big questions in a concise and accessible way; considering what context you can offer to aid interpretation: for example, where appropriate, setting the statistics in a UK, European, and global context; and making the links between the statistics on landings, vessels and fishers to provide for richer analyses.
- Reviewing your assurance arrangements, and how you communicate them for users, to ensure that they sufficiently reflect the complexity of the data and respond to transitions to evolving IT systems, processes and collection arrangements. Your team explained that continuous improvements are made that deliver greater control over the data and its assurance. We understand that these changes also bring challenges in data quality to be overcome, particularly in ensuring continuity during and immediately after transition. We know that your team works closely with statisticians in the Marine Management Organisation, who produce the UK statistics, ensuring that processes are aligned and the data quality remains high and we encourage this approach. Our [Quality Assurance and Administrative Data framework](#) should provide a useful guide.

I encourage the team to keep users informed about its progress in realising these developments.

I am copying this letter to: Alastair McAlpine, Senior Statistician and Head of Agricultural Statistics; Kirsty Bosley, Marine Analytical Manager; and Cameron Melvin, Assistant Statistician and Lead on Scottish Sea Fisheries statistics.

Yours sincerely



Mark Pont
Assessment Programme Lead