Dear All

With the 2017 fishing season now well underway I wanted to take this opportunity to write to you to update you on the timetable for taking forward the assessment of conservation status for 2018. I would also like to thank stakeholders who have contributed local data which has helped to refine the assessment of conservation status. The programme of support for angling clubs continues to generate a lot of interest and over 50 clubs have signed up for the service so far. I have enclosed the first six month progress report which contains a detailed summary of the services on offer and examples of how FishPal can work with local clubs to tailor support to their individual needs.

**Assessment of conservation status for the 2018**

*Assessment by river*

Moving on from the district approach in 2016, the assessment model for the 2017 fishing season categorised 168 individual rivers/groups of rivers (where rod catch and counter data has allowed) and 17 Areas of Special Conservation. Where that has not been possible the assessment was made at fishery district level and districts have been graded as category 3 (mandatory catch and release). This approach has been acknowledged by the sector as a positive move forward. Work continues with stakeholders to allocate rod catches to individual rivers and this has enabled a small number of new rivers/groups to be assessed for 2018. Further information is available from the Marine Scotland [website](http://www.gov.scot/Topics/marine/Salmon-Trout-Coarse/fishreform/licence/status).

*Data and methodology*

We continue to engage with local biologists through the Salmon Advisory Group to refine the methodology behind the conservation status system. The Group continues to review the progress made by the Technical Working Groups which are taking forward: exploitation rates; grilse-error; electrofishing data; fish counters; and radio/acoustic tracking and telemetry. Further information is available from the Marine Scotland [website](http://www.gov.scot/Topics/marine/Salmon-Trout-Coarse/fishreform/licence/MSBiologist).

The numbers of fish returning to an area are estimated largely using reported catches. Reliable catch data is therefore a key requirement if we are to accurately assess the status of Scotland’s salmon stocks. Given the importance of reported catch in the assessment process, failure to report catch will result in an underestimate of the stock and may affect whether salmon may be legally retained in

subsequent years. The effects of unreported catch may be felt most strongly in smaller rivers where relatively few fisheries are active. It is therefore essential that accurate catch data is received by the Marine Scotland Science team at Montrose. Further information is available from the Marine Scotland [topic sheet.](http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0051/00512279.pdf)

*Timetable and engagement with stakeholders*

Stakeholder dialogue and the refinement of the data used to undertake the assessment will continue as we take forward the annual assessment of conservation status over the coming months. We are working to complete the assessment process by the end of June and aim to consult with stakeholders on the provisional categories during the month of July. This is with a view to having the legislation in place by the end of November in time for the busy Christmas booking period.

**Support for Angling Clubs**

The programme of support for angling clubs in partnership with FishPal continues to promote catch and release as a responsible and sustainable fishing method and delivers practical support for angling clubs to market their fisheries.

The programme aims to:

* support angling clubs to mitigate membership decline as a result of mandatory catch and release;
* provide direct assistance and guidance for angling clubs through a marketing and promotion strategy to advertise catch and release as a sustainable and desirable activity;
* promote catch and release more widely as a sustainable method;
* support angling clubs to improve catch reporting to feed into the Conservation Plan process; and
* promote good handling practice.

As part of their work to promote catch and release FishPal have produced three short films which promote good handling practice:

[Film 1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XqPFyohnMGk) - Tackle

[Film 2](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BnanaQyC6oQ) - Planning the River

[Film 3](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ucE4KgHzsPM&feature=share) - Catch and Release

The films have been very well received and shared more widely by the sector.

Any angling clubs keen to learn more about the support on offer and how to access the programme should complete the form on the FishPal [website](http://www.fishpal.com/Scotland/AnglingClubs/) or alternatively they can contact Tom Cater on 01573 470 612 to discuss.