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Dear Mairi,

Thank you for your letter of 1 August regarding fisheries consultations, reforms and funding announcements.

I welcome your comments about continued collaboration. I look forward to hearing more about your plans for UK-wide engagement on the 21 Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) that the Scottish Government is leading, and which are to be published by the statutory deadline of the end of next year. We have received positive feedback from across the UK – including from Scottish industry – about the approach Defra has taken with the first six FMPs, and we should all look to build on this as we deliver the rest of the UK's FMP programme. I understand Defra project planners have been working with your teams, which I hope is helpful. The Defra teams remain on standby to help timely delivery, including reviewing drafts in the coming weeks. However, I remain nervous that progress will stall as we move into autumn negotiations unless we can all ensure the FMP work is sufficiently resourced. Given the scale of the programme, cross-UK interest and challenging timescales, perhaps it would be useful to touch on progress at a future meeting of the Inter-Ministerial Group?

I note that the Scottish Government has now published its response to last year's consultations on remote electronic monitoring and future catching policy. Given your comments, I was disappointed I did not receive any notification directly from you. I do understand Defra officials were notified on the previous working day. As you highlighted, we need to be mindful of knock-on impacts across all UK administrations, and I agree we need to give each other sufficient space and time to have robust technical discussions prior to decisions being made.

I understand Defra officials took on board the comments provided by your officials during the meeting on 28 June. Whilst the scope of this consultation is England only, Defra officials will continue to discuss areas of common interest with officials from all UK administrations. We look forward to receiving any comments you have in due course.

I welcome also your positive comments about the proposed licensed recreational bluefin tuna fishery and other consultations. It is also pleasing to hear that Scottish Government has now also launched a consultation around sandeel fishing in Scottish waters. The summary of responses we have published in response to Defra's consultation earlier this year on the same topic may well be of interest to you in this regard.

Turning to funding, the UK Seafood Fund (UKSF) has been delivered at a UK-wide level as the UK seafood supply chain is geographically dispersed and complex. Future prosperity of the UK seafood industry is dependent on building connectivity across the UK supply chain to improve effectiveness in a more strategic way. Defra officials worked closely with your officials on the design and development of the UKSF to address key priorities and ensure there is no confusion or overlap between the UKSF and any local schemes you may have. As with any public funding,

Defra has ensured that robust mechanisms are put in place to avoid double funding. This includes requiring applicants to declare what funding they are receiving, or have received, from other Government schemes. Defra has shared information on potential successful Scottish projects with your officials, prior to award, to check for any duplication in local schemes. As a result, we have awarded £29.4 million to Scotland through the UK Seafood Fund with future announcements planned.

As you know, the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund was introduced in July 2021. We would welcome the opportunity to work collaboratively with your officials on the design and development of any future funding schemes informed by developments in the EU. Engagement has started on the development of an operational agreement to further cement collaborative working through plans for data sharing, future funding and to agree a common approach for meeting World Trade Organization (WTO) requirements and dealing with trans-boundary projects. Finally, on WTO matters, I look forward to your swift confirmation that the Scottish Government has completed the necessary work to enable the UK to move forward with the ratification of the recent WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies.

Yours sincerely,



**Rt Hon Mark Spencer MP**