

Forum closing remarks

Gordon Brown

Ladies and Gentlemen. I just want to wrap the proceedings up, briefly, if I may.

I hope you will agree with me that it has been a useful and an informative day. We started with Rhona Brankin and, I think, one or two of the messages, that I hope will stick with you, is the political endorsement that she gave to the importance of salmon and freshwater fisheries and the potential for the sector, which I know is an issue that she is very alive to.

I think she underscored what we have been trying to do and that is, work together, work inclusively and she, too, endorsed the Forum process. I think she gave colleagues and I our orders for the coming months, in the sense that she wants us to be a proactive Executive, engaged with you in the issues of the day.

The other message, which I have been going on about, and she also mentioned today, was the need to get, well, there is obviously the need for a debate to be had, about future management arrangements; but, if there is change needed, and, if there is public expenditure required, then that is a message that we really have to get over to parliamentarians this side of the next elections in Scotland.

On the Bill, which was the main session this morning, I thought it was. I agree with Ron that it came to a sort of natural end about lunch time, but there was not a clamour of people still wanting to make points. I thought that, within the discussion we had, of over fully two hours, there were a lot of excellent points made and you have left us with quite a number of issues to reflect upon; registration of hatcheries, the issue of the linkage between the industry code of practice and the Bill, crayfish, gill nets etcetera.

We did spend quite a bit of time on, although it had really nothing to do with the Bill, on the issues of birds and seals and the damage they can do to freshwater fisheries and if we are to have a forum in the future, perhaps that is an issue that we could return to in the Steering Group and, who knows, maybe in this wider Forum. Both to understand the present, quite tricky and complex, regime that is in operation and how that might be improved for the future. So, I think I take that point away as a possible future agenda item.

I suppose, on the Bill, I am pleased that you are pleased with the contents, with the proposals, so far. That is particularly pleasing to me. The Steering Group process, I think you mentioned nine meetings, Ron. I had lost touch of how many there were. It's a big group. Yes it's inclusive. We have had our moments on it, but I've actually enjoyed enormously chairing it, because there has been a lot of buy-in and compromise and consensus at the end of the day and I think we have made progress. I remember saying, at the very first Steering Group that I chaired, that I hoped that the consultation document that we eventually produced would reflect the views of that group and I think that we have achieved that and I thank you for your contribution to that. We couldn't have done it without you.

On new management authorities; we heard from Andrew and Keith and really you heard it here first. I hadn't seen or heard Keith's presentation and what he had to say to us today. As I have said already, I think it is important that the Steering Group, indeed all of us, reflect

on that preliminary advice that Keith has given us. Between now and the March Steering Group, I would invite you to reflect, and to think, and give some initial impressions back to your Steering Group members, so that in March we can have a discussion on what Keith and his company have proposed, but I do promise you further iterations, further discussions, on that issue in the months to come.

Arthur gave us a very helpful up-date on the *Gyrodactylus* front, the contingency planning, the new powers and the need to have preventative measures in place to keep it out. We want to keep its status as exotic. Two things I would like to say though about *Gyrodactylus*; the first is that we are concerned about the prospect of losing Rotenone as the main treatment. I hesitate to say the only treatment, but it is not far off that. Aluminium Sulphate would provide an option, but it would be infinitely more difficult. The Norwegians, the Norwegian Government, are putting in this dossier to the Commission to keep Rotenone available and we will be supporting that. In fact, I hope to send an expert to Norway, to help in the completion of the dossier before it is submitted.

I think I have mentioned this also to Andrew; when he is in Brussels, to lobby the Commission to keep this product on the market, to give it an extended life, so that we, if we ever do have a problem with *Gyrodactylus*, we don't go to the medicine cupboard and find there is virtually nothing there to help us treat it.

The other thing I finally want to say about *Gyrodactylus* is, having gone through this entire process of the contingency, taking powers etcetera, we want to have a dummy run, probably within the next year, and we haven't quite thought through what we mean by a dummy run, whether it would be a sort of emergency paper exercise or a paper exercise combined with some sort of field activity. But I do want to test the contingency plan and, although Arthur's contract ends at the end of March, we will maybe see if we can find some dosh to bring him back to help with a dummy run so we will keep you posted on that front as the year unfolds.

Ron's comments and reflections on the Forum were very helpful, I think. I think what I took from it was that, yes, it has been a success so far and your show of hands endorsed that. I was particularly struck by what Ron said about the partnership within the Forum and the Steering Group, not only a partnership amongst you as freshwater constituents, but I took that to mean also a partnership with us in the public sector. By that, I mean SEPA, SNH and the Executive and I would say hear, hear to that and I hope we can continue in that same vein. You heard my Minister say this morning that she sees the Forum as a good example of best practice and I, too, would endorse that and would be very happy to continue in the Forum process and, if it is the will of the Steering Group, for the Executive to continue to chair it on other issues. That's fine. We would gladly do that, but, equally, we will stand aside and let somebody else take the chair, particularly on non-legislative issues. So, we are open-minded there.

I suppose just two or three very concluding remarks. Can I extend my thanks, your thanks, to the various speakers that we have had today. I thought they have all given splendid contributions and I would like to thank them very much.

I would like to thank my colleagues, not only for the contributions that they have made during the day, but also for organising this event and ensuring that it has gone off very smoothly. There has been a lot of effort gone in to do that. I am very honoured to have a

very talented team back in Pentland House and I think we saw that today, both in the organisation and the delivery of some of this. So, thanks to my colleagues.

I would like to thank you for coming; coming here to Dundee, in such good numbers, and I think we can, on the basis of our discussion today, promise you another public Forum, perhaps before the end of the year. We will have to see how the issues unfold and what the agenda looks like.

And finally, before you hit the road, there are coffees and teas, just outside. So, if you have a journey to go, take a few minutes, finish off all that discussion you were having at lunch time and have coffee and tea and I wish you a safe journey home and we will see you again some time in the future.

Thank you.