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8th September 2015

Dear Rob,

Thank you for your letter dated 02 September requesting a delay in laying of subordinate legislation for Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) to allow you to hold evidence sessions with stakeholders. I hereby confirm my agreement to that request so that you can do so.

In doing so I would like to offer some clarity regarding why the Orders are being brought forward. The purpose of the Orders is to implement management measures to fulfil legal obligations for already designated MPAs and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs).

The four draft Marine Conservation Orders (MCOs) were published on 11 June 2015 and representations invited from stakeholders by 09 August. These representations are being considered and may result in changes to the draft MCOs. Under the terms of Section 87 of the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 a revised draft MCO must be published and representations invited before proceeding with the Parliamentary process.

I will not determine my final position on the draft Orders until after Committee scrutiny so that any new evidence that may become available through that process can be considered. I will confirm the way forward as soon as possible after consideration of the Committee's report.

RICHARD LOCHHEAD