

Councillor Robin Currie

Leader



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Rt Hon Alister Jack MP,
Secretary of State for Scotland
Scotland Office, UK Government

Our Ref: RC/AMcN/AJ150121

Your Ref:

By email to: enquiries@scotlandoffice.gsi.gov.uk

15th January 2021

Your Ref:

Dear Alister

Argyll and Bute's Seafood Sector Sustainability

In the two weeks since the UK left the European Union on 31st December last year, I have been contacted by numerous Argyll and Bute residents and businesses who share my very deep concerns about the future sustainability and, indeed, the survival of our vital shellfish and fishing sector.

The seafood sector is a vital component of our already-fragile regional economy and the inability, virtually overnight, for producers and processors to get their time-sensitive products to market or to customers. If allowed to go unresolved, this sector is likely to disappear badly affecting Argyll and Bute's overall recovery and future growth.

Fish and shellfish from Argyll and Bute are high quality products of internationally renown. The industry has been a mainstay and a major employer in the area for many decades, sustaining not only the local economy but making a significant contribution to the Scottish and UK economies. Now, though, I am hearing from fishing families of long standing, newer start-up businesses and companies employing hundreds of people in total, that if urgent action is not taken, they will have to close their doors for good. This would be devastating for Argyll and Bute, where the sector comprises many single family-operated vessels, smaller fleets, artisan producers as well as some medium to larger enterprises.

As a council we are doing all that we can to support these businesses and prevent this imminent disaster. Our officers are working behind the scenes to assist and are in constant discussions with the Scottish Government to reiterate the critical need for the commercial hubs to operate smoothly, ensuring that the right processes are in place to help businesses get their goods to their customers. We are also speaking with local producers to help them navigate these new processes and to issue all the necessary paperwork where appropriate, so that some of these valuable products reach buyers. Delays on both sides of the border

has already seen valuable product being lost together with valued customers who are seeking their produce elsewhere.

Very urgent action and assistance is needed now from your Government in order to prevent this traditional Scottish industry sector from disappearing altogether.

The companies who have not been able to sell to their customers because goods cannot reach them need urgent compensation for lost produce and sales in order to help them regroup and stay in business.

Most urgently of all getting products to market must be streamlined, simplified and sped up. These products need to be prioritised over less time sensitive products with longer shelf lives – if the situation is allowed to persist then very many companies will have no choice but to give up, costing jobs and much needed revenue to the treasury.

In addition to improving processes and the speed of delivery here in the UK, these businesses, so vital to Argyll and Bute and Scotland's economic recovery and future success, need your Government to negotiate urgently with its counterparts in Europe to identify and resolve the delays in allowing fresh goods to arrive in and then to progress on to customers.

I cannot state strongly enough that these actions are needed now. More is required, though, in the medium and longer terms, to help this beleaguered industry to get afloat again and regain some buoyancy. Producers and customers need reassurance that future supplies will be prioritised and to regain confidence in the industry through dedicated marketing and investment where possible through the £100m fisheries fund your Government announced following the publication of the agreement.

I am copying this letter to the Scottish Government's Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy, Fergus Ewing, Argyll and Bute's MSP, Michael Russell (also Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, Europe and External Affairs) and our MP, Brendan O'Hara. Our seafood sector desperately needs Government to take action to secure its survival. Please do what you can, urgently, to avoid its demise.

Yours sincerely



Robin Currie
Council Leader