

Press release by e-mail from: John F. Robins, Campaigns Consultant, Animal Concern, Post Office Box 5178, Dumbarton G82 5YJ. Tel: 01389-841111, Mobile: 07721-605521. Animal Concern incorporates the Scottish Anti-Vivisection Society which has been Campaigning for animals since 1876  
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**EMBARGOED UNTIL 00.01hrs Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> September. To Sunday newspaper contacts only.**

George Pullar, Director of Usan Salmon Fisheries Ltd, has been replaced as the representative of the Salmon Net Fishing Association of Scotland (SNFAS) on the Scottish Government Wild Fisheries Reform Stakeholder Reference Group (WFRSRG) after his company was fined £7,000 for 9 breaches of wildlife conservation legislation. Mr. Pullar had admitted failing to comply with close time regulations by operating salmon nets at the weekend when they should have been rendered inoperative to allow salmon to migrate to their spawning grounds.

John Robins of Animal Concern had asked the Government to act and to stop taking advice on wildlife conservation from someone involved in wildlife crime. However Mr. Robins has dismissed this apparent success as a Pyrrhic victory. He stated:

“Although George Pullar is no longer attending Wild Fisheries Reform Stakeholder Reference Group (WFRSRG) meetings his company is still a Member of the Salmon Net Fishing Association of Scotland (SNFAS) and will be able to influence Government policy through their input to the WFRSRG. I also asked the Government to ascertain whether or not the Scottish Gamekeepers Association has any wildlife criminals among its membership and, if so, to stop using the SGA as an advisor on wildlife law. That request, and my suggestion that a conservationist be added to the WFRSRG have been dismissed out of hand. It has also come to my attention that Mr Pullar first attended Government meetings over a month after admitting his company had broken the law.”

Mr. Robins has now raised some questions under the Freedom of Information Act to try and determine if Government Ministers were aware of Mr. Pullar's situation before his appointment and to find out who blocked the request for an investigation into the suitability of the Scottish Gamekeepers Association to advise the Scottish Government on wildlife conservation legislation.

EDITORS NOTES: The brief letters from Marine Scotland are attached and our subsequent e-mail to the Minister is copied below.

E-MAIL FROM: John F. Robins, Campaigns Consultant, Animal Concern, Post Office Box 5178, Dumbarton G82 5YJ. Tel: 01389-841-639, Mobile: 07721-605521. Animal Concern incorporates the Scottish Anti-Vivisection Society which has been Campaigning for animals since 1876  
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Dr. Aileen McLeod MSP,  
Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform,  
St Andrew's House,  
Regent Road,  
Edinburgh EH1 3DG

Dear Minister,

I do not know if you have seen copies of the two replies (attached) dated 14th September which I received from Ms Valerie Lusk of Marine Scotland on your behalf in response to my e-mails to you of

21st August 2015 and 3rd of September 2015 regarding the membership of the Wild Fisheries Reform Stakeholder Reference Group (WFRSRG).

After reading those replies I immediately checked my birth certificate and can find no reference on that to either the River Clyde or banana boats.

As you may remember in my e-mail to you of 21st August I requested that Mr. George Pullar who represented the Salmon Net Fishing Association of Scotland (SNFAS) on the WFRSRG be removed from the WFRSRG as he had, in his position as a director of Usan Salmon Fisheries Ltd., admitted to nine breaches of wildlife conservation legislation and his company had been fined £7,000 for those offences. In my e-mail of 3rd September I asked why no action had been taken. I welcome the fact that Mr. Pullar will no longer represent SNFAS on the WFRSRG however I understand that Usan Salmon Fisheries Ltd. are still members of SNFAS.

Paragraph 4 of the Wild Fisheries Reform Stakeholder Reference Group Remit states: ***“Members will communicate and consult with colleagues in their organisations prior to and following meetings of the group;”***. This indicates that under the Remit of the WFRSRG the SNFAS has a duty to consult with and represent the members of SNFAS at WFRSRG meetings.

SNFAS are obviously doing this as shown in the Minutes of the WFRSRG meeting of 2nd July 2015: ***“SNFAS were unable to attend the meeting but asked that the wider group note their concerns that the consultation document does not explicitly recognise their unhappiness about the operation and appropriateness of the weekly close time. The group recognised that the concern had been raised and it was noted that at this stage in the process we are considering the broad principles of a modern management system for Scotland.”***

It was of course multiple failures to observe weekly close times which Mr. George Pullar admitted to in court and for which his company was fined. Although he has personally been removed from the WFRSRG it is obvious that, through his Membership of the SNFAS, Mr. Pullar will continue to have the ability to influence the WFRSRG and the way the Scottish Government deals with any new legislation on wild fisheries in Scotland.

I now request that the SNFAS be removed from the WFRSRG until such time as they bar Usan Salmon Fisheries Ltd. from membership of their organisation.

I also asked you to rescind any seal shooting licences issued in connection with Usan. In her letter reference 2015/0028767 and 2015/0028775 of 14th September Ms Lusk stated; ***“I understand that all 3 of the seal licences issued to Usan Fisheries Ltd in the current year 2015 have already expired.”***

As the salmon netting season is over for the year that is a natural conclusion to those licenses. Can you tell me if Usan Fisheries Ltd., a company convicted of wildlife crimes, or those who held seal shooting licenses on behalf of the company will be considered for seal shooting licences for any purpose in the future?

In my e-mail to you of 21st August I stated; ***“Nine organisations were chosen by the Scottish Government to form this Stakeholder Reference Group. Regretfully and astonishingly not one of those nine organisations has fish conservation, fish welfare or wildlife protection as their main remit. I ask you to immediately remove Mr. George Pullar from the Stakeholder Reference Group and replace him with someone whose main concern is fish conservation, fish welfare and wildlife protection.”***

In my e-mail to you of 3rd September I asked the Scottish Government to ascertain if any Members of the Scottish Gamekeepers Association (SGA) have been convicted of wildlife crimes and, if they had, that the SGA be removed from the Stakeholder Reference Group on Wild Fisheries Reform and any other position as advisor to the Scottish Government.

In her second brief letter (reference 2015/0030885) of 14th September Ms Lusk made no mention of the SGA but stated "***There are no plans to change the membership of the Stakeholder Reference Group further.***".

Once again this decision is nothing short of shocking. Was it taken solely by the civil servants at Marine Scotland or were you or any other elected politician involved in this decision? I find it ridiculous that you will not take steps to determine whether or not an organisation advising the Scottish Government on wildlife conservation legislation has any convicted wildlife criminals amongst its members. It is also totally unacceptable to not even consider appointing someone whose main concern is fish conservation, fish welfare and wildlife protection to the WFRSRG.

If someone from the conservation lobby had been at the WFRSRG meeting on 2nd July 2015 they may have queried why, if we want to conserve and protect fish stocks, the Scottish Government should be encouraging young people to take up angling. They might also have questioned why, even before the consultation was launched, the Scottish Government was opposed to introducing a rod license in Scotland. A rod license could be used to make anglers responsible for their actions and to ban those who persistently leave dangerous litter behind them or fail to observe measures designed to conserve fish stocks and improve the welfare of fish caught on rod and line.

I regret that in an effort to receive a reply of more than a few inadequate and dismissive lines I must ask the following questions under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 and/or the Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations 2004. I also request copies of all communications both internal and external, including letters, e-mails, memos, meeting minutes and notes plus (should they exist) any transcripts or recordings of telephone calls, referring to:

**1: Who appointed the nine members of the Wild Fisheries Reform Stakeholder Reference Group, what involvement did any elected MSP/Government Minister have in these appointments and were any other organisations considered for but not offered membership?**

**2: When was the membership of the Wild Fisheries Reform Stakeholder Reference Group decided and was the person or persons making the appointments aware that George Pullar had admitted in court in January this year that his company had broken close time legislation on several occasions?**

**3: Who decided not to act on my request of 3rd September 2015 to investigate the suitability of the Scottish Gamekeepers Association to be a member of the Wild Fisheries Reform Stakeholder Reference Group and why was this decision taken?**

Yours sincerely,

John F. Robins,  
Secretary to Animal Concern