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**The Rt Hon Angela Eagle DBE MP**

Minister of State  
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs  
Seacole Building  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> December 2025

Dear Minister,

I am writing on behalf of the Angling Trust and the recreational sea fishing community we represent to express serious concerns regarding the agreed recreational pollack bag limit of three fish per angler in 2026. While we recognise the current status of pollack stocks and remain committed to co-designed, evidence-based fisheries management, it is vital that decisions reflect the substantial body of collaborative work already undertaken by the recreational sector over the past two years.

During this period, recreational anglers, charter operators, scientists, and Defra officials have worked constructively through the Pollack Fisheries Industry Science Partnership (F.I.S.P.) project and subsequently co-developed voluntary measures via the Pollack Pact to support pollack recovery. This work has generated new data on catches, effort, size structure, and angler behaviour; trialled and promoted the use of descending devices to reduce release mortality; and improved understanding of seasonal spawning aggregations. Collectively, this evidence points towards management measures such as an increased minimum landing size and targeted protection of spawning aggregations across the fishery, rather than blunt tools such as highly restrictive bag limits, which now pose socio-economic risks to the sector.

Against this background, there is a strong perception within the recreational sector that this extensive collaborative effort has not been adequately reflected in the agreed management outcome. This has undermined confidence in the co-design process and risks disengagement at a time when partnership working is essential for stock recovery, and more broadly across fisheries management.

In addition to these concerns, the implementation of the three-fish bag limit is likely to have profound economic consequences for the recreational charter sector and associated coastal businesses. The average cost of a full-day charter trip is approximately £700, excluding additional expenditure on bait, accommodation, and travel, all of which provide an important boost to coastal economies through tourism. Many anglers travel long distances with the expectation of retaining several fish. A three-fish bag limit significantly reduces the perceived value of a charter trip, increasing the likelihood of cancellations or substitution with shorter trips. This threatens operators' ability to cover essential operating costs, including fuel, maintenance, mooring fees, insurance, and crew wages, making continued operation financially unviable for many businesses.

Unlike the commercial sector, charter operators have received no compensation for the impacts of restrictive management measures. Commercial fishing businesses have benefitted from financial support

during periods of constraint, while the recreational sector is expected to absorb the economic shock alone, despite generating substantial economic activity through tourism, tackle sales, accommodation, fuel supply, and other ancillary services.

These impacts reflect the wider risks of reactive fisheries management that does not fully integrate available evidence or socio-economic considerations. Without mitigation, the cumulative effect is likely to include charter business closures, job losses, and wider harm to coastal economies.

Thriving fish stocks are the foundation of our fishing communities and healthy seas. The Angling Trust remains fully supportive of evidence-based, co-designed fisheries management. However, this requires not only continued investment in data collection, but also a clear commitment that evidence already generated collaboratively is meaningfully reflected in policy decisions. We also remain committed to continuing this work with the department to ensure future measures command confidence and deliver genuine conservation benefits.

**Our three key requests are as follows:**

1. **Introduce a compensation package for affected charter operators**, comparable to the support provided to commercial fishers. This should include interim financial assistance, targeted grants to offset lost bookings and operating costs, and practical support to facilitate adaptation where possible. Delivery could be via the Fisheries and Seafood Scheme or the new Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund.
2. **Commission an independent economic impact assessment** of the three-fish pollack bag limit on charter operators and the wider recreational fishing community, to ensure the full social and economic consequences are properly understood.
3. **Provide continued funding to build on the existing recreational pollack research programme**, including long-term data collection to underpin ICES stock assessments, further co-design with the recreational sector, and the development and dissemination of best-practice educational resources on fish handling and descending devices.

The Angling Trust remains committed to working constructively with government to deliver practical conservation outcomes that support both pollack recovery and the viability of coastal businesses. However, we cannot remain silent where there is a clear imbalance in how management impacts are addressed between the commercial and recreational sectors - particularly when the Fisheries Act (2020) and Joint Fisheries Statement explicitly recognise recreational fishing as part of the UK fishing industry.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss how the substantial evidence already generated through collaboration can be more effectively reflected in future management decisions.

Yours Sincerely,

Jamie Cook  
**Chief Executive Officer**  
**Angling Trust and Fish Legal**

