

# SSACN 'Contact Us' Policy



This Policy sets out the Scottish Sea Angling Conservation Network's expectations when dealing with queries however received and whoever from.

It has been put in place to clarify what those who contact us with a query can expect from us and what we expect of those who contact us.

**Simply stated – Mutual respect at all times**

## 1. Background

By providing a 'Contact Us' facility via forms, email addresses or telephone numbers on our web and Facebook pages we hope to provide a service which is accessible to all.

SSACN has limited resources.

Our primary concern is to maximize the benefit we can get from them and whilst communicating our activities is very important we do have to prioritize our work, to that end, in responding to queries we will endeavour to :

- Respond to a Member's query within 5 working days.
- Respond to a non-Member's query within 10 working days.
- Make it clear what SSACN can or cannot do in relation to an inquiry, including where appropriate, passing a query on to a more relevant body in it's original form content and language.
- Be open and not raise hopes or expectations that we cannot meet.
- Deal fairly, honestly, consistently and appropriately with all queries.

At the same time we have a 'duty of care' to our staff and we need to ensure they suffer the minimum of aggressive or abusive behaviour. To that end we:

- Expect our staff to be treated with courtesy and respect.
- Will not reply to queries based on unsubstantiated allegations or accusations.
- Will not reply to queries expressed in manners which we deem to be unacceptable, too aggressive or abusive.
- Reserve the right to use examples of correspondence for training and education purposes may be useful in future (example at Appx A).

Unfortunately there are those who abuse our facility, misrepresent us or continually undertake actions aimed at undermining our operation. For people such as these we reserve the right not to respond to them.

## 2. Defining Unacceptable Queries / Postings

These definitions apply equally to comments raised on our social media presences or through any of our contact mechanisms. Communications are deemed **Unacceptable** if they :

- Are made without any means of contacting the originator.
- Attempt to 'hijack' a thread or discussion on any of SSACN's own social media.
- Are sarcastic, defamatory, excessively aggressive or which make unsubstantiated accusations or allegations.
- Make unreasonable demands for answers based on unfounded allegations or unsubstantiated claims made by the enquirer and/or third party.
- Repeatedly change the substance of a query or raise unrelated concerns in order to perpetuate a discussion.
- Cause any member of SSACN staff to feel afraid, threatened or abused.
- Have been reported to us as causing distress or similar to any Member of SSACN or the general public and which we have reviewed and found unacceptable.

It is these types of behaviour, plus others as and when they may arise, that we aim to manage under this Policy.

The following sections discuss in further detail our expectations, what we consider as unacceptable behaviour and what steps we will take in the event we consider a communication to be unacceptable. They apply equally to all form of communication.

## **2.1 Aggressive or Abusive Behavior**

- Violence is not restricted to acts of aggression that may result in physical harm. It also includes behavior or language (whether oral or written) that may cause staff to feel afraid, threatened or abused.
- Examples of behaviors grouped under this heading include threats, physical violence, personal verbal abuse, derogatory remarks and rudeness. We also consider that inflammatory statements and unsubstantiated allegations can be abusive behavior.
- We expect our staff to be treated courteously and with respect. Violence or abuse towards staff is unacceptable.

## **2.2 Unreasonable Demands**

The SSACN 'Contact' and social media facilities are staffed solely by volunteers who give freely of their time and who will make every effort to respond in a timely fashion, we do not have the bandwidth to address unreasonable demands

- What amounts to unreasonable demands will always depend on the circumstances surrounding the issue and the membership status of the individual raising it.
- Examples of actions grouped under this heading include demanding responses within an unreasonable time-scale, insisting on answers to unfounded allegations or unsubstantiated claims, repeatedly changing the substance of a query or raising unrelated concerns.

We consider these demands even more unacceptable and unreasonable when personal attacks on SSACN volunteers or misrepresentations of SSACN volunteers or policies are then carried out in other media.

## **2.3 Unreasonable Persistence**

This is a form of attack regularly practiced by internet trolls.

Unreasonable demands and persistence become even more unacceptable when they take up what SSACN regards as being a disproportionate amount of time and resources.

- We recognize that some correspondents will not or cannot accept that the SSACN is unable to assist them further or provide a level of service other than that provided already.
- Examples of actions grouped under this heading include persistent refusal to accept a decision made in relation to an issue, persistent refusal to accept explanations relating to what SSACN can or cannot do and continuing to pursue an issue without presenting any new information.

The way in which these complainants approach our office may be entirely reasonable, but it is their persistent behavior in continuing to do so that is not.

### 3. Managing Unacceptable Actions

- There are relatively few queries or people whose actions we consider unacceptable.
- How we aim to manage these actions depends on their nature and extent.
- If it adversely affects our ability to do our work and provide a service to others, we may need to restrict an individual's contact with our office.
- We may restrict contact in person, by telephone, fax, letter or electronically or by any combination of these.
- The threat or use of physical violence, verbal abuse or harassment towards SSACN staff may result in the ending of all direct contact with the individual concerned – Member or not. Incidents may be reported to the police. This will always be the case if physical violence is used or threatened.
- We will not deal with any form of communication that is abusive to staff or contains allegations that lack substantive evidence. If this happens we will decline to respond clearly stating those grounds.
- Where someone refuses to accept the answer we have given and repeatedly raises the same issues, we will explain that there will be no further discussion on the issue concerned.
- Where someone, especially a non-Member of SSACN, continues to correspond on a wide range of issues their action will be considered excessive and they will be asked to limit or focus their questions accordingly.

Ultimately, where someone's actions are considered unreasonably persistent and the individual continues to dispute SSACN's response or decision relating to their issue they will be placed on the 'no personal contact' list and only acknowledged or responded to if the future if they provide significant new information relating to the issue.

### 4. Deciding to Restrict Contact

- SSACN staff who directly experience aggressive or abusive behavior should immediately restrict any contact with the individual(s) concerned to pointing out this policy and that action will be taken appropriate to the situation and in line with this Policy.
- With the exception of such immediate restrictions taken at the time of an incident, decisions to totally restrict contact with SSACN will only be taken after careful consideration of the situation by the Management Team.
- Wherever possible, we will give Members the opportunity to modify their behavior or before a decision is taken; non-members may not be afforded the same privilege.
- Members will be told in writing why a decision has been made to restrict future contact, the restricted contact arrangements and, if relevant, the length of time that these restrictions will be in place; non-members may not be afforded the same privilege.
- Any restriction will be implemented by way of a resolution passed by a simple majority vote at a Management Committee meeting, providing the following procedures have been observed:-
  - At least 21 days' notice of the intention to propose the resolution must be given to the Member concerned specifying the relevant grounds.
  - The Member concerned shall be entitled to be heard on the resolution at the Management Committee meeting at which the resolution is proposed.

## **5. Recording and Reviewing a Decision to Restrict Contact**

- We record all incidents of unacceptable actions. Where it is decided to restrict contact, an entry noting this is made in the relevant file and on appropriate computer records.
- A decision to restrict contact may be reconsidered if the individual concerned demonstrates a more acceptable approach. SSACN's Secretary will review the status of all restricted contact arrangements on a regular basis.

Any questions, queries etc regarding this document should be sent to the Secretary, his contact details are on the 'Contact Us' page of our website [www.ssacn.org](http://www.ssacn.org)

## **Appendix A.**

SSACN has a duty of care to our Volunteers and we need to ensure, as far as is possible, they are not subject to harassment or intimidation, especially those who do not have extensive personal knowledge of the area associated with the query.

The following is a fictitious conversation (though one based on an actual event) which highlights appropriate and inappropriate use of the service which is available to all.

### **QUERY 1.**

*I notice there are some exciting new developments on the tagging front - I wonder if you would be kind enough to let me know exactly what type of acoustic tag is being used?*

*Jimmy Smith (A perfectly framed general question)*

**Response 1** *(Being answered by a non-specialist but someone who used our FAQ facility to collate the perceived response)*

*Dear Mr SMITH,*

*Thank you for your interest - the Acoustic tags we are using are Vemco V13.*

*Their use is strictly controlled by the Home Office and only certified personnel can carry them out and our project officer has been fully trained and certified to carry out these procedures. There will be a more detailed write up on these and the work we are doing in the next SSTP update report.*

*Thank you for contacting SSACN and the SSTP.*

*Chrissie*

**Followed by Supplementary 1 - *beginning the move to a personal agenda rather than a query***

*Hi Chrissie*

*Thank you for your prompt and detailed reply, it was exactly the information I was seeking along with further details also. (further details = my agenda)*

*When can we expect to see the SSTP update report as my head is simply swimming with questions (It now becomes apparent that Jimmy has already researched considerably and has not "just noticed" as stated in the initial question )*

*Given that the Vemco V13 will produce results that will well exceed the 8 conventional tag returns that SSTP have had to date, will the conventional tagging now cease ? ((Jimmy is making an assertion without providing any evidence and asking a question that cannot be answered without that evidence.)*

*Kind Regards – Jimmy*

### **Response 2**

*Dear Mr SMITH*

*I'm glad I was able to help but I did little more than get the information of our websites. The SSTP will be releasing a progress report to our Members around Christmas for their*

*comment and input, it will then be published on our Reading Room web page for the wider audience. (Simple honest answer)*

*Each of the studies, the acoustic work, the conventional tagging, anecdotal evidence gathering etc on their own cannot be expected to fully answer questions regarding all the aspects of fish movement or behaviour, however, when added together they can provide a better understanding and help drive further research; (statement of fact)*

*As we do not know as yet how successful the V13s will be, we shall be continuing all forms until the science suggests otherwise. (Simple honest answer)*

*Many thanks for your continuing interest and for contacting SSACN and the SSTP.*

*Chrissie*

**Supplementary 2 - At this point the SSACN representative has honestly answered the questions - Mr Smith now descends into the inappropriate behaviour which will not be tolerated by SSACN.**

*Dear Chrissie*

*I think we've been corresponding for long enough now that we can safely dispense with formalities, my friends prefer to call me Jimmy and also you have me at a disadvantage, given that I'm unaware of your surname.*

*(An inappropriate suggestion.)*

*I'm impressed that you found all the information, I can see you bringing SSACN / SSTP in to the forefront with research skills like that.*

*(Use of sarcasm – all the answers Chrissie found were there on the SSTP website and the FAQ section of the SSACN website – all Mr Smith had to do was look.)*

*Any chance of a glimpse of the early progress report that is going out to your Members also?*

*(He's already been told in the last answer that when it is released it will be available on the SSACN Reading Room and at this point Mr Smith descends into a soapbox rant moving into the use of **You** rather than **SSACN** - another form of bullying - and loses all coherent structure becoming personal and demanding the meaning of life the universe and everything.)*

*You mention a need to "drive further research" which does rather paint a picture as the lochs becoming a playground for a modern day Dr Frankenstein (a book by Mary Shelly, BTW).*

*What are you seeking to 'research' here and how long is it envisaged that this 'research' will now take ?*

*What plans do you have in relation to an open structured approach to your research?*

*You also mention continuing "all forms until the science suggests otherwise", may I ask just what "science" this would be?*

*Is there an official SSACN policy to deliberately mislead the general public ?*

*Is there a willingness to accept that the current SSACN operating model is flawed and needs to change?*

*Hope to hear from you soon*

*Jimmy (Mr) (Sarcastic, totally inappropriate and beginning to verge on sexual harassment.)*

No one can answer tirades such as these and as stated at the beginning, this is not an actual example however it is representative of some of the questions we have received and some of the attacks made on our staff.

Descending to these levels of harassment badgering, bullying and innuendo would leave SSACN with only one option - banning the said person from the service and alerting any other appropriate organisations to the behaviour of the individual concerned.

## **Appendix B**

### **Facebook Page Policy**

This policy will be fully incorporated into the next revision, but is appended here to ensure completeness.

Our Facebook page exists to encourage engagement with the Scottish Shark Tagging Programme and to help you keep up to date with our activities.

We welcome comments that are :

- "on topic" and respond directly to the content at hand
- responding to comments left by others
- brief and to the point
- positive / constructive in tone.

We discourage comments that :

- are not "on topic"
- are excessively long or negative in tone.
- make unsubstantiated claims

We will delete comments, without notice, that :

- offer no means of contacting the originator
- contain advertising or spam
- contain any personal information belonging to the poster or another person (such as address, phone number, email address)
- include material that is unlawful, libellous, fraudulent, defamatory, obscene, abusive, threatening, harassing, insulting or deemed confidential
- have the whole post or comment written in capital letters
- "bomb" the facebook page with repetitive postings
- attempt to hijack the facebook page by importing personal conflicts, agendas or grudges.

Any misuse will be managed as per Section 3 onwards.

Comments are also subject to Facebook's Terms of Use and Code of Conduct - any contraventions will be reported accordingly and if applicable, to the originators ISP.

Users of our Facebook page are responsible for exercising judgement when evaluating and taking action based on the posts of others. Posts by other people may reflect significantly different levels of knowledge and experience.

Comments posted on our Facebook page do not necessarily represent the interests or opinions of SSACN or the SSTP.