

PETER GIBSON MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

September 2022

Dear Caughtvent

Thank you for your email about sustainable fishing in British waters.

The Fisheries Act enshrines in law the Government's commitment to sustainable fishing through its objectives and fisheries statements and through the new legal commitment to produce Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) to restore our fish stocks to sustainable levels. The Act contains a 'bycatch objective' seeking to reduce the wasteful practice of discarding fish; an 'ecosystem objective' to minimise and, where possible, eliminate negative impacts on marine ecosystems; and a new 'climate change objective' which recognises and seeks to reduce the impact of fishing on the health of our oceans and our planet.

The UK is a global leader in protecting the ocean and our marine life across the UK, and 374 Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) now protect 38 per cent of UK waters. I am aware that these areas are all subject to planning and licensing regimes to ensure they are protected from damaging activities and further plans to manage fishing activity in them continue to be developed. The Government's £500 million Blue Planet Fund will help some of the world's poorest communities to protect the ocean from plastic pollution, overfishing and habitat loss. In August 2021, Ministers announced the first five programmes under the Blue Planet Fund totalling £16.2 million of funding.

The draft Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS) commits the UK Government and Devolved Administrations to work together to adopt an 'ecosystem-based approach' to fisheries that will underpin a vibrant, profitable fishing industry that is resilient to climate change. The JFS includes a list of proposed Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) that will be published by the UK administrations. FMPs are a cornerstone of the Government's approach to fisheries management now that the UK has left the EU's Common Fisheries Policy.

I am aware that the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) has developed an ambitious programme for assessing sites and implementing byelaws to manage fishing activity in all English offshore Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). In inshore waters, 98 MPAs already have management in place to protect sensitive habitats from bottom towed fishing gear. I understand that the first four offshore byelaws are now in force and plans are in place to protect all offshore sites by the end of 2024, using powers in the Fisheries Act.

Byelaws are developed using an evidence-led process to determine what measures are required to protect sites. Site-by-site assessments are carried out to tailor management measures and to avoid unnecessary restrictions on fishing. Only fishing activities which could damage the protected features of an MPA require management, such as trawling on the seabed. I am assured that the MMO and Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities will always manage any fishing activity that is found to be negatively impacting the protected features of MPAs.

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The MMO recently launched a call for evidence on its draft fisheries assessment for the next 13 offshore MPAs. Ministers are considering policies for large pelagic trawlers and flyseining, working with the industry to develop more robust management of the non-quota species that these vessels are targeting, as well as quota stocks.

Once again, thank you for taking the time to contact me and if I can ever be of any further assistance to you then please do not hesitate to contact me again.

Yours faithfully
Peter Gibson

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