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Y Dirprwy Weinidog Amaeth a Physgodfeydd
Deputy Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref MB/RE/3059/14

Alun Ffred Jones AM
Chair of the Environment and
Sustainability Committee
National Assembly for Wales

18th July 2014

Dear Alun Ffred,

Welsh Government Response to European Commission proposal for a ban on the use of driftnets

Thank you for your letter to my predecessor Alun Davies AM dated the 24 June to outline the concerns of the Environment and Sustainability Committee regarding the recently announced proposal by the European Commission for a prohibition on the use of driftnets in EU waters. I very much share your concerns on the potential impact on the activity of our Welsh fishermen.

It is quite clear to me that in setting out the background to the proposal the EU Commission have identified some serious issues encountered in the large scale driftnet fisheries concerning incidental by-catch of species such as turtles, seabirds and marine cetaceans. In particular the issue seems to be prevalent where nets over 2.5 Km in length are being used to target highly migratory species such as tuna and swordfish. I understand the EU Commission have identified concerns over the enforcement and implementation of the rules and clearly the fisheries where the problems occur are in the Mediterranean, in the Baltic or on the High Seas and there seems little relevance to the small scale fisheries around the Welsh coast where we simply do not have the serious by-catch or enforcement issues that the Commission is trying to address.

The recommendation for a blanket ban is a very blunt and inappropriate way of tackling the problem with unintended but profound consequences on the small scale coastal fisheries such as the ones found around the coast in Wales and other parts of the UK for that matter. The numerous inshore fishermen actively using small scale driftnets in Wales fish for herring, bass, mullet and various other species. These fisheries are very selective with minimal by-catch and in turn provide a valuable part of the livelihood of small coastal

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communities. I have now received several queries from Welsh fishermen and stakeholders who are all opposed to the widespread nature of the proposal.

Consequently I have now written to the Defra Fisheries Minister George Eustice MP to clearly state my objection to the proposal as it stands and highlighting the inappropriateness of such a blanket proposal to our coastal fishery. I expect Defra to now write to the EU Fisheries Commissioner Madam Damanaki as the UK lead on Fisheries matters and express the concerns of the UK on this proposal. Additionally, my officials recently met with their counterparts in the European Commission to highlight our concerns and the potential economic impact of the proposal on the Welsh fleet and also explain the measures already in place to manage these fisheries.

My officials will continue to work with Defra, in drawing up a comprehensive policy approach should the Commission seek to proceed with the proposal. They have already contributed in detail to the Explanatory Memorandum now produced by Defra to highlight the effects of this proposal on fishermen, particularly on those based in small coastal communities. In progressing this issue we will be highlighting the unintended consequences of this proposal and be urging the Commission to take a more risk-based and regionalised approach. We will be working with other UK administrations to identify any fisheries which do pose a problem and develop specific solutions for them. I certainly do not consider that our small scale coastal fisheries pose any such by-catch threat. We will certainly question the Commissions evidence base in respect of small coastal fisheries such as exist in Wales. This approach is in line with the existing requirements of existing EU by-catch regulations on the use of certain types of nets in the North Sea and in Western waters where there is an issue of incidental catches of other vulnerable or protected species.

The next likely step will be for the UK Government to work together with like-minded EU Member States to develop an appropriate response to the Commission's proposals. We anticipate discussions in Brussels to commence soon. The Welsh Government will be fully involved in the debate to press for a more proportionate approach to resolve the issue and find a way forward which enables coastal driftnet fishing to continue round the Welsh coast.

I hope that my response provides some reassurance of the seriousness we have given to this matter.

Yours,
Rebecca

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