

Huw Irranca-Davies AS/MS
Y Dirprwy Brif Weinidog ac Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros
Newid Hinsawdd a Materion Gwledig
Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate
Change and Rural Affairs



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref: HIDCC/PO/0311/24

Paul Davies MS
Chair
Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

6 November 2024

Dear Paul,

Thank you for your letter of 21 October seeking my views on the proposals contained in the joint UK consultation on amendments to the Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS). I am also grateful for your acknowledgement of the deadline of 29 November. I have taken each question in turn below.

To what extent has the Welsh Government been involved in the preparation of the consultation draft?

The Fisheries Act 2020, paragraph 2(1) of Schedule 1, requires that fisheries policy authorities, acting jointly, must prepare a consultation draft. The Welsh Government has been fully involved in the preparation of the consultation draft from the outset. A UK Task and Finish Group was established in August 2024 to consider concerns raised by the UK Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) Working Group that the deadlines for publishing the FMPs would not be met. The Welsh Government has been represented on both the Working Group and the Task & Finish Group and my officials have been directly involved in the decision taken to review Annex A of the JFS and the preparation of the consultation draft. My officials advise me that the collaborative approach across all the UK has been exemplary and in line with the ways of working set out in the Fisheries Management and Support Common Framework Memorandum of Understanding.

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Gohebiaeth.Huw.Irranca-Davies@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Huw.Irranca-Davies@gov.wales

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Could you share your views on, and justification for, the removal of Welsh Ministers as a responsible authority for preparing and publishing a number of joint Fisheries Management Plans (FMP)s?

21 of the plans, being co-ordinated by Scottish Government, include the Welsh Government (along with the other Fisheries Policy Authorities) as being jointly responsible for their preparation and publication. Given what we have learnt from the FMP process so far, and by reflecting on the FMPs' scope and geographical extent, it was considered prudent to seek views on whether it is necessary to remain as joint responsible authority for these plans. Removal of Welsh Ministers as a responsible authority would enable us to focus our finite resources on the publication and implementation of the FMPs of most importance to Wales. The [consultation document](#) sets out the detail of the proposal on pages 12 – 13.

Could you set out whether any impact assessment has been undertaken on the removal of Welsh Ministers as a responsible authority for these FMPs. For example, could the removal impact ambitions for Welsh fishers to target those stocks in the future?

Given this narrow focus of the consultation on Annex A of the JFS, my officials considered the need to amend the Narrative Impact Assessment (NIA), which was completed for the JFS originally. They advised the amendments proposed to Annex A will not change the impacts identified in the NIA as the proposed amendments are to Annex A only. Therefore, the proposed changes will not affect the FMP policies in the JFS. Prior to publication all FMPs are subject to appropriate impact assessments.

Specifically on the removal of Welsh Ministers as responsible authority, our data tells us no more than two of our fishers have operated in the areas concerned in recent years, and when they have, catches of the stocks subject to the relevant FMPs have been incidental bycatch only. Removing Welsh Ministers as a responsible authority will not impact any future ambitions of fishers who might wish to target these stocks or need to cover bycatches, subject to the established practices for obtaining quota which remain unchanged.

We believe management actions relating to the risk of over-exploitation, socio-economic aspects and ecosystem interactions should be implemented by those authorities which have regulatory responsibilities and/or direct fisheries interest in the geographic areas covered by those FMPs. Direct fisheries interest includes the likelihood of an authorities' vessels fishing in, or waters being adjacent to, these areas. In both cases this likelihood is minimal.

Whilst Welsh vessels may fish in areas outside of the Welsh zone which will be impacted by those FMPs, we wish to take a proportionate approach reflecting that Welsh vessels rarely catch the species which are the subject of those plans. This would be a consistent approach with the other FMPs listed, where Welsh Ministers do not have joint responsibility because the FMP geographical extent falls wholly outside of the Welsh zone.

Could you set out whether there is a mechanism in place, or planned, for Welsh Ministers to regain responsibility for those joint FMPs, and what this would involve. For example, could consideration of responsible authorities be a standard part of the six-year review of each FMP?

Fisheries Policy Authorities must review a JFS whenever they consider it appropriate to do so and may prepare and publish a replacement or amended JFS at any time. The responsible authorities for FMPs are listed in Annex A of the JFS and there is also an obligation under the [Fisheries Act 2020](#) to review the JFS before the end of a six year period from publication.

Therefore, if at any time Welsh Ministers considered it appropriate to regain responsibility for any FMPs, a review of the JFS could be sought.

As you mention, once published, each FMP will also be subject to six-year review, further, the relevant authorities must review an FMP whenever they consider it appropriate to do so. I will ask my officials, through their engagement in the UK FMP Working Group, to recommend that the consideration of responsible authorities should be a standard part of a review of each FMP.

I hope this information answers all your questions. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Huw Irranca-Davies', written in a cursive style.

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