

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

Eich cyf/Your ref P-06-1547  
Ein cyf/Our ref HIDCC/01406/25

Carolyn Thomas MS  
Chair - Petitions committee

27 August 2025

Dear Carolyn,

Thank you for your letter of 31 July, regarding a petition which calls on the Welsh Government to ban all forms of bottom trawling by both foreign and UK vessels in Welsh Waters.

Our marine environment is precious, and we need to ensure it remains healthy and resilient for future generations. Welsh seas are some of the richest and most biologically diverse across Europe. They are home to many habitats and species of national and international importance.

Wales has a wide network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) which cover 50% of all Welsh waters. Effective MPA management is critically important in ensuring that our MPA network is resilient and in favourable condition to meet both international biodiversity targets, such as 30x30, and domestic targets soon to be introduced through the Environment (Principles, Governance and Biodiversity Targets) (Wales) Bill.

There are many factors to acknowledge when considering bottom trawling within our MPAs. Fishing in Wales is largely carried out by a small-scale inshore fleet targeting shellfish. The use of bottom towed fishing gears, such as trawls and dredges, in our inshore waters (out to 12 nautical miles) is limited. The most prevalent use of such gears is in our king scallop fishery, for which we recently published a Fisheries Management Plan (FMP).

It is important to recognise that the king scallop fishery is already tightly controlled. Before permits are issued, the Welsh Government conducts a Habitats Regulations Assessment to ensure the fishery will have no adverse effects on the protected features of European Marine Sites.

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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.

Further management improvements are planned as part of the implementation of the king scallop FMP. My officials have been working with a range of stakeholders to develop proposals for a new framework of measures to enable adaptive management of this fishery which will be subject to public consultation. In parallel with the stakeholder consultation, we have commissioned Bangor University to investigate seabed sensitivity and benthic ecosystem integrity in areas of scallop fishing to inform future management.

In the wider Welsh zone, there is activity from EU vessels in the Celtic Sea who target nephrops and demersal fish. Their access is governed by the Trade and Cooperation Agreement - the terms of which the UK and EU recently agreed to extend for another 12 years.

Delivery of the FMP programme remains a top priority for this Government. It is a key mechanism for systematically improving management of specific fisheries and the use of certain fishing gears such as bottom towed gears, either within MPAs or the wider marine environment. Any management measures for other bottom-towed gears in Welsh waters will be developed and implemented as part of other FMPs. Namely the Irish Sea Demersal FMP and the Celtic Sea and Western Channel Demersal FMP which are due to be published in 2026.

When considering Wales' MPA network, it is important that we recognise that our MPA network is highly complex with 139 sites in total. Some of the sites are very large and include protection for both mobile species and benthic (seabed) habitat features. However, individual benthic habitat features typically only occupy part of each site. Additionally, some sites are only designated for mobile seabird or cetacean species features and contain no designated benthic features at all.

Natural Resources Wales have recently published the Welsh MPA condition assessments which cover 84 features within the inshore marine Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) found wholly in Wales. These assessments provide critical information to help us understand the health of our Marine MPAs and are the first comprehensive assessments of our Marine MPAs at designated feature level. The assessments showed that no assessed habitat or species within the MPA network were found to be in an unfavourable condition due to impacts caused by fishing. The assessments can be viewed here- [Natural Resources Wales / Condition assessments for Welsh European marine sites \(EMS\)](#)

Skomer is currently Wales' only Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) and was designated to conserve species and habitats of national and international importance. The seas within Skomer MCZ are subject to specific fishery bylaws which prohibit the use of bottom contact mobile fishing gear, specifically dredges and beam trawls.

Consideration by the Welsh Government for any further restrictions on the use of bottom towed gears within Welsh Marine Protected Areas will be based on robust evidence, the needs of the features and site conservation objectives.

Yours sincerely,



**Huw Irranca-Davies AS/MS**

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