



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

WRITTEN STATEMENT BY THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

TITLE **Marine Conservation Zones and Marine Protected Areas in Wales**

DATE **18 July 2013**

BY **Alun Davies AM, Minister for Natural Resources and Food**

This statement is to update Members on progress with the Welsh Government's commitment to ensure that Wales fulfils its contribution to an ecologically coherent network of well-managed Marine Protected Areas (MPAs).

Members will be aware that I have restated my determination to ensure that we put in place a range of policy interventions to ensure that the Welsh seas and the diversity of life they support are healthy and robust to support the demands we put upon them now and in the future. Many people in Wales rely upon and use our seas to support their livelihoods and recreational activities. We want this to continue and develop as part of our blue growth agenda.

Last year we consulted on options for highly protected Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs). This generated a substantial response that expressed divergent and strongly held views. A task and finish team, supported by a Stakeholder Focus Group, was established to consider and advise how we should take forward MCZs in Wales. I have met with both of these groups to thank them for their positive and constructive contribution throughout the process.

I will be taking forward the recommendations of the task and finish team and to avoid any continuing uncertainty over the options presented in the 2012 consultation, I am also withdrawing all the proposed sites. As a next step, I want to understand more about the wide range of marine habitats and species that are already protected by a series of 125 MPAs that cover 36% of Welsh seas. Over the last 12 months we have developed a better understanding of what constitutes a coherent network. We are

now in a stronger position to assess our current contribution to the network's ecological coherence. I have, therefore, commissioned an assessment of our current MPAs to identify if there are any gaps and what the options might be to fill those gaps. If any measures are required, I believe they should be simple, proportionate and fit for purpose.

I will be in a position to reach a view on whether further action is needed early next year, after considering the outcome of our MPA assessment and the response to the Historic Rights consultation – that I have also announced today.

Whilst the assessment of MPAs will take a detailed look at our existing contribution, I am already aware of some elements that may need strengthening. We will consult later this year on extensions to three of our Special Protection Areas for breeding sea birds.

Whilst our existing sites are required to achieve their conservation objectives, these sites also need to be well-managed. My officials will continue to work with Natural Resources Wales to review the management of our sites and, where necessary, identify improvements. Any proposed changes to the management regime will be outlined in the Marine and Fisheries Action Plan that I will announce in November.

Notes

1. A summary of responses to the MCZ consultation – *Potential Site Options for Welsh Waters* - is available on the Welsh Government website:
<http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/environmentandcountryside/mczpotentialsites/?status=closed&lang=en>;
2. The Report of the Task and Finish Team on MCZs in Wales is available on the Welsh Government website:
<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/environmentcountryside/consmanagement/marinefisheries/conservation/protected/conservationzones/nextsteps/?lang=en>;