

Lesley Griffiths AC/AM  
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros yr Amgylchedd a Materion Gwledig  
Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Mike Hedges AM  
Chair  
Climate Change, Environment & Rural Affairs Committee  
National Assembly for Wales  
Cardiff  
CF99 1NA

2 November 2017

Dear Mike

Thank you for your letter of 3 October regarding my response to the Committee's report on our approach to Marine Protected Area (MPA) management. Your letter raised a number of queries about the response which I would like to clarify.

I am satisfied the MPA Management Steering Group is the right forum for the Welsh Government to provide leadership, advice and obtain a collective steer to ensure we have an effectively managed network of MPAs in Wales. The Steering Group is the means by which the management authorities across Wales come together to discuss and agree ways to secure effective management and assist with the delivery of actions which ultimately improve the condition of our MPAs.

The Welsh Government gave a clear steer to management authorities earlier this year, when I wrote to remind them of the importance of fulfilling their statutory responsibilities to manage the marine environment. More recently, my Department has been working with the Steering Group to develop a coherent approach to management across the MPA network. This is the MPA Management Priority Action Plan (it was incorrectly referred to as the National Plan for Managing our Network of MPAs in the response to another recommendation). It includes an approach where management actions are targeted to where they are expected to deliver the greatest improvement (or maintenance) in feature condition. Resources are stretched across the public sector and there is a need to continue to prioritise against competing demands. An approach which targets expenditure and management activity to where it will have the greatest positive impact upon feature condition is, in the current climate, the most appropriate and affordable means of securing improvements across our network of sites. When established, my Department will seek the views of stakeholders through the Wales Marine Advisory and Action Group (WMAAG) and I have asked my Department to send a copy to the Committee at the same time.

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay  
Caerdydd • Cardiff  
CF99 1NA

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

[Gohebiaeth.Lesley.Griffiths@llyw.cymru](mailto:Gohebiaeth.Lesley.Griffiths@llyw.cymru)  
[Correspondence.Lesley.Griffiths@gov.wales](mailto:Correspondence.Lesley.Griffiths@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.

As stated during my oral evidence to this inquiry, I am satisfied with current staffing levels within Welsh Government to deliver our marine conservation responsibilities. It is important to recognise the cross cutting nature of the work within the Marine and Fisheries Division and with partners such as Natural Resources Wales which contribute to the management of marine protected areas.

More specifically the work of our Marine Enforcement Officers is diverse in nature and range from dealing with EU and UK control measures such as satellite monitoring, catch data and effort management on fishing vessels through to enforcing against marine licensable activity and marine licence conditions. The work of officers on the ground is prioritised and directed at those activities which pose the highest risk at any one time to ensure the Welsh Government meets its obligations. Officers fully investigate and if necessary prosecute those who contravene the regulations in place. Officers currently have 36 active investigations, 12 of which are due to appear in Magistrates Court before the end of the year.

I have already committed to publishing a summary of the main discussion points and actions arising from stakeholder meetings, including minutes from the MPA Management Steering Group, on the Welsh Government website. Updates on the Steering Group's work, and on MPAs more generally, have already been provided to the WMAAG either verbally or in writing. These updates include options for managing our sites as a network, completion of our MPA network and progress on the Assessing Welsh Fishing Activities project. The most recent WMAAG meeting in May included a session on the work of the MPA Management Steering Group and the move to a needs-based approach to management. At the next meeting of the WMAAG on 15<sup>th</sup> November stakeholders will have the opportunity to develop, refine and maximise the activities and engagement opportunities for Year of the Sea in 2018 and beyond.

The need for, and membership of, other specialist groups is identified through engagement and discussion with stakeholders. My Department reviews the terms of reference and work programmes for these groups on a regular basis to ensure they are still fit for their purpose and delivering the outcomes we are collectively working towards.

The availability of robust data, evidence and research is vital to ensure effective management and sustainable use of our seas. We collaborate with a range of partners organisations and a number of partnerships already exists which focus on marine science and evidence. I would not want to duplicate structures and forums by establishing a Wales marine science partnership. The work to develop a consistent and evidence based approach for marine biodiversity monitoring programme is being led by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee in partnership with Natural Resources Wales and the other country conservation bodies. Opportunities to work with others, through shared standards, to collect and collate evidence and data will be considered as this programme of work develops, including using vessels of opportunity, industry and volunteers.

At a Welsh level, we are leading the way by producing indicative Site Condition Reports for each of our Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas. I expect the reports to be published towards the end of the year. Natural Resources Wales' project to move towards a more regular production of site condition reports is at an early stage, but I will keep the Committee informed of progress.

In my written statement earlier this year, regarding completion of the network of MPAs, I outlined my request for officials and stakeholders to work in partnership to deliver this work. I expect much of this work to begin and align with transfer of the offshore nature conservation powers, for marine conservation zones, in April 2018.

My Department and I continue to meet with counterparts across the UK to discuss issues arising with the UK's exit from the EU. Officials from across the UK are engaged in technical discussions. Our engagement is supported by the Stakeholder round table and its sub groups I initiated in response to EU Exit. I will be setting out my vision for managing Welsh Seas following our exit from the EU early next year.

On the point about EU funding, I reiterate it is for the UK Government to assess and explain what it is going to do to replace funding lost as a result of exiting the EU. I have made it clear on a number of occasions I do not expect Wales to lose any funding as a result of Brexit.

Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lesley Griffiths". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping 'L' and 'G'.

**Lesley Griffiths AC/AM**

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