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Selaine Saxby MP
House of Commons
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20 October 2020

Dear Selaine,

Thank you for your letter of 21 July to the Secretary of State on behalf of your constituents about the Benyon Review of Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs). I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area and I apologise for the delay in doing so.

Defra appreciates the importance of recreational sea angling to the economy, its benefits to the health and welfare of society, and the contribution anglers and angling bodies make to environmental improvements.

I met with the Angling Trust in July 2020 and explained that we are keen to further understand the evidence surrounding catch and release angling, particularly on the marine environment and fish species. We agreed that we would work together to explore and commission research on the potential impacts and opportunities of recreational sea angling in and around HPMAs. This approach is consistent with suggestions in Mr Benyon's Review, that there is potential for co-management with recreational sea users who can undertake monitoring and collect scientific data. We would welcome further advice and discussion with recreational sea anglers on how other countries manage catch and release angling within HPMAs, and where the designated area includes buffer areas for recreational fishing.

In introducing HPMAs, we note the Panel's recommendation to pilot sites by placing them within existing Marine Protected Areas. We would consider the socio-economic impact of HPMAs on all sectors, including recreational sea angling, before any decision to designate a site. Our intention is to engage early, and continuously with affected stakeholders in order to mitigate the impact of any new designation. The sites outlined within the Benyon Review are a starting point for the Government and are not pre-determined sites for HPMAs.

We will be considering the Review's recommendations carefully over the coming months. We know there will be wide interest from all sectors in the Government's response to the report, and we will listen to stakeholder views as we consider the panel's recommendations.

Defra will continue to work closely with all marine users to ensure the needs of all are effectively balanced whilst maintaining our aim of a healthy marine environment. Thank you once again for taking the time to contact the Secretary of State about this important issue.

REBECCA POW MP