

Lesley Griffiths AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Materion Gwledig a Gogledd Cymru, a'r Trefnydd
Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales, and Trefnydd



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref LG/10186/21

Jack Sargeant MS
Chair - Petitions Committee
Senedd Cymru

27 August 2021

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your letter of 28 July, regarding a petition which calls on the Welsh Government to ban all forms of bottom trawling in Welsh Waters.

I recognise the importance of having a healthy, productive, biologically diverse and resilient marine ecosystem. Our network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) plays a key role in achieving this and there are currently 139 MPAs covering 50% of the Welsh marine area.

Our MPAs are designated under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (inshore) and Conservation of Offshore Marine Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. Management of these sites are designed to provide sufficient protection for the species and habitats for which they are designated (their features). This approach enables site features to achieve or maintain 'favourable condition'.

The sites are not intended to be 'no go' areas and many non-damaging activities are allowed, including some forms of fishing. All features within sites are assessed against potential harm from these activities and management provisions are proposed where necessary. For fisheries, in scenarios where there is evidence to demonstrate potential harm to a feature, it is possible to manage impacts within sites using mechanisms such as Fishing Orders.

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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.

Pembrokeshire Marine SAC and Cardigan Bay SAC are two inshore sites designated for benthic habitats that have a small proportion of their area spanning into the offshore. Scallop (king) dredging is restricted by the Scallop Fishing (Wales) (No 2) Order 2010/269 in Pembrokeshire Marine SAC and no other towed gears are known to be used. Similarly, scallop (king) dredging is restricted by the same Order in all but a small area where the designated feature is absent in Cardigan Bay SAC and no other towed gears are known to be used.

Currently Wales only has one wholly offshore MPA which has been designated for benthic habitats – the Croker Carbonate Slabs Special Area of Conservation (SAC), in the Irish Sea, West of Anglesey. No towed gears are being used in this site which would harm the feature for which the site is designated (Methane Derived Authigenic Carbonate; MDAC). This is largely because the physical nature of the designated benthic habitat would pose a serious hazard to any vessels using towed gears. Supporting this, a recent 'Feature Condition Assessment' undertaken by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) assessed the features within this site as in a 'Favourable' condition.

<https://data.jncc.gov.uk/data/9e4ea87b-2c3a-4b2e-9442-ff50d6fa64d1/Croker-4-ConservationStatements-V1.0.pdf>

MPAs cannot currently be designated for a resource such as carbon potential, but can protect habitats with high carbon capture potential, known as 'blue carbon habitats'. These habitats where designated can subsequently be managed using management measures outlined above. I recognise the importance of carbon sequestration and storage within our marine environment and Welsh Government will be supporting further research into the stocks and fluxes of carbon in marine habitats.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lesley Griffiths". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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