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Y Gweinidog dros yr Amgylchedd, Cynaliadwyedd a Thai  
Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government

Ein cyf/Our ref JD2614/10

Mr S J Lockwood  
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11 January 2011

Thank you for your letter dated 22 November regarding the MPA Fishing Coalition's concerns with the Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) Project in Wales.

I have noted your two main areas of concern; the approach to designating highly protected sites in Wales and . I will deal with each item in turn.

First turning to the Welsh Assembly Government's decision to establish highly protected MCZs in Welsh waters. As you know we already have an extensive area of sea protected by marine protected areas (MPAs), such as Special Areas of Conservation. The Welsh Assembly Government decided that rather than use the new MCZ powers to protect a greater area of the sea around Wales, it would establish some highly protected sites with most, if not all, of these sites being within existing MPAs. This is part of our approach to implementing an ecosystem approach to Wales' seas where we expect these sites to contribute to marine ecosystem recovery, improve environmental resilience and enhance our understanding of natural ecosystem functioning.

I recognise that our understanding of highly protected sites and the contribution they can make to a MPA network and the wider marine environment is developing. There is however strong scientific opinion both internationally and domestically that highly protected sites are an important part of any marine protected area network because of the role they play in terms of supporting recovery, enhancing resilience and improving our understanding of the marine environment. However until we know more about the ecosystem benefits delivered by these sites we have taken the decision to limit the number of sites to be designated to no more than 3 to 4 MCZs, in the first instance. Post designation monitoring, research and review work will provide further evidence to inform how we proceed in the future.

**Jane Davidson AM**

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