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Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

**Written Response by the Welsh Government to the report by the Economy,  
Trade and Rural Affairs Committee entitled Scrutiny of the draft Joint Fisheries  
Statement**

In accordance with Schedule 1, Part 1, Section 3 (3) of the Fisheries Act 2020, a fisheries policy authority (the Welsh Ministers) must lay before the appropriate legislature a statement setting out its response to a resolution or recommendation made by an appropriate legislative body or appropriate legislative committee.

I welcome the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs (ETRA) Committee's report on [Scrutiny of the draft Joint Fisheries Statement](#) and the recommendations contained therein. As I advised in my letter of 25 May, your recommendations have been taken into consideration as the draft Joint Fisheries Statement was reviewed for publication. This was carried out alongside the other UK legislatures' reports and responses from the public consultation.

The [Joint Fisheries Statement](#) has been published today, along with a [Government Response](#) to the draft JFS consultation.

I have set out my response to the report's individual recommendations below.

## **Detailed Responses to the report's recommendations:**

### **Recommendation 1**

**The Welsh Government should work with the other UK nations to ensure ambitious and specific targets are included in the Joint Fisheries Statement which will enable actions plans to be developed. The targets should be co-developed with stakeholders, in particular the Welsh fisheries sector, and designed to promote its growth in a sustainable way.**

#### **Welsh Government's response: Accept**

Earlier this year I established the Ministerial Advisory Group for Welsh Fisheries (MAGWF). I want to set a clear direction for our fisheries in Wales and agree with the need to work with our stakeholders to develop policy to promote the sustainable growth of our Welsh fisheries sector.

The Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS) is a strategic policy document, jointly developed with the four fisheries policy authorities (FPAs) of the UK. It sets the framework and direction of travel for delivering world-class sustainable fisheries across the UK, within the context of the devolution settlements. Since Committee scrutiny, and in response to public consultation responses (as stated in the Government Response), "the overall ambition of the JFS has been strengthened to reflect a more coherent policy and strategic approach to fisheries management, including better integration between fish stock health, the wider marine ecosystem and a resilient fishing industry".

The Welsh Government did, in line with this recommendation, work with the other UK nations to consider where ambitious and specific targets could be included in the JFS. It was the view of the FPAs that it would not be feasible, or reflect devolution of fisheries, for specific targets to be set out in the JFS, which are largely a matter for individual FPAs.

The FPAs also note in the Government Response that "applying time-bound targets to policies within the JFS would be inappropriate given the need to fairly engage with stakeholders and industry, gather evidence as part of ongoing policy development and potentially develop and test technology or adapt and innovate gear (where appropriate or necessary). However, work is being undertaken in a timely fashion, with work on many of the underlying policy areas in the JFS and the Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) already underway. The FMPs will, where appropriate, provide more detail, and the need for specific and time-bound measures will be determined in development with stakeholders".

### **Recommendation 2**

**The Welsh Government must work with the other UK administrations to ensure data collection policies and procedures are comprehensive enough to monitor the population and health of a wider range of fish species/stocks, not just those which currently make up the majority of fishing catches.**

#### **Welsh Government's response: Accept**

Fisheries is a devolved competence, however, as set out in our underlying partnership approach, the FPAs will continue to work together to deliver the required evidence base. Policies on collaborative working around science and evidence in the JFS provide UK-wide benefits, helping each FPA to meet its needs in terms of data collection and scientific advice, while also supporting the UK in delivering on its international obligations.

The JFS now states “The evidence base will be maintained and enhanced to support the fisheries objectives, including on sustainability, climate change, bycatch and an ecosystem-based approach. This includes improving our collective understanding of the impact of fishing and aquaculture on the marine environment and seeking ways to assess the wider effects of fishing on non-commercial species.”

The way in which we improve the collection of data, will be crucial to the future management of our fisheries, and we are committed to making improvements where necessary.

We will continue to work with the other UK administrations to co-ordinate our data collection, whilst maintaining our focus on the evidence base and the specific data needs of Welsh fisheries and the Welsh marine environment.

### **Recommendation 3**

**The Welsh Government should set out how it plans to meet the costs of the coordinated programme of data collection, in particular the financial assistance that will be offered to the Welsh fisheries sector to support its role in increased data collection.**

#### **Welsh Government’s response: Accept**

The UK Work Plan 2022 commits Wales to continue to work closely with the other FPAs to continue monitoring key stocks of interest and deliver improvements where possible to the existing evidence base. In Wales, our focus will be on delivering stock surveys to support the ongoing management for key species in Wales. Welsh Government officials are scoping potential collaborations and wider UK funding available to fill further evidence gaps identified and support future policy development.

We will ensure that our future funding supports the direction of travel set out in the JFS, including in areas such as evidence gathering. We want to encourage and to maximise the benefits which can be derived from a collaborative approach to data collection. The Marine, Fisheries and Aquaculture (Financial Assistance) Scheme (Wales) Regulations 2022 were laid on 15 November, which will enable us to open a financial assistance scheme for funding the marine, fisheries and aquaculture in December.

I was pleased to see in your report the acknowledgment of the introduction of vessel monitoring systems earlier this year, and recognition of the benefits it will bring. To support the fishing industry with this new requirement, Vessel Monitoring System devices were offered free of charge to the Welsh fishing fleet. Over recent years Welsh Government has worked to improve data collection on fishing activity and in 2020 Catch Recording, a mobile phone application for the fishing industry to use to self-report what they have caught, was introduced for vessels under 10m in length. The fishing activity covered by these two new systems account for over 90% of the Welsh commercial fishing fleet, delivering information on what is caught, where fishing occurs and how much fishing effort is undertaken, providing significant benefits for management of the marine environment.

Many of our current data collection and evidence gathering programmes include the involvement of the Welsh fisheries sector (recent examples include the scientific work undertaken on Bluefin Tuna in Welsh waters and the annual Whelk stock assessments), these Welsh fishers bring significant expertise and local knowledge to the data collection and improve the quality of the Welsh evidence base. Where fishers and skippers have contributed to Welsh Government research programmes they are fairly recompensed. We

aim to maintain or increase the involvement of Welsh fishers in data collection, where the science standards allow.

#### **Recommendation 4**

**The Welsh Government should work with the other UK administrations to ensure the inclusion of strategies and clear targets for the reduction of sea litter within the JFS.**

#### **Welsh Government's response: Accept**

The Government Response, published today, sets out that “The JFS is a strategic policy document, setting the framework and direction of travel for delivering sustainable fisheries management across the UK within the context of the Devolution Settlements and reserved matters. The intention of the JFS is to set out the UK’s fisheries policies at a high level, and it includes strategic marine litter policies. Each fisheries policy authority thereafter providing greater detail on their respective, substantive fisheries policies in due course, including the extent to which those policies would achieve, or contribute to the achievement of, the fisheries objectives in the Act”.

The JFS sets out our commitment to reducing marine litter and supporting the industry to reduce its environmental footprint. Welsh Government is committed both nationally and internationally towards the reduction of marine litter and has supported the recent development of the OSPAR Regional Action Plan for marine litter, in addition to the continued delivery of the Wales Marine Litter Action Plan. To support their delivery, Welsh Government continues to coordinate the Clean Seas Partnership and working collaboratively with marine litter experts and members of the fishing industry, recognising their importance to the achievement of this target in the JFS.

The JFS makes links to the Marine Strategy, which contains an overall target for the reduction of visible marine litter, including, beach, floating and seafloor. Welsh Government is working closely with the UK and Devolved Governments as well as internationally through OSPAR to develop quantifiable targets suitable for marine litter, not just for the UK, recognising the transient nature of litter.

#### **Recommendation 5**

**The Welsh Government should look to develop a clear strategy setting out how it will encourage innovation in gear design, support lost gear retrieval and facilitate the disposal and recycling of fishing gear at ports.**

#### **Welsh Government's response: Accept**

I agree it will be important to set out how we will encourage innovation in gear design, support lost gear retrieval and facilitate the disposal and recycling of fishing gear at ports. To that effect, Welsh Ministers have committed through the British Irish Council, to introduce management measures for the collection and recycling of fishing gear.

Welsh Government are working closely with all UK Administrations to identify options such as an EPR scheme and other non-legislative options. A [report](#) has been jointly published by Defra and the Devolved Governments examining different policy options to be taken at a UK level. The report also highlights the complexities of the waste stream for fishing gear, from purchasing to its disposal. Whilst I do not disagree with the recommendation, for it to be fully implemented it will require a collaborative approach between the UK and Devolved Governments.

Wales has already launched an end-of-life fishing gear recycling scheme at a number of ports and harbours following a pilot in 2021, becoming the first UK nation in which to do so at a national scale. The ports are currently Conwy, Amlwch, Holyhead, Cardigan, Milford Haven and Swansea, with a view to expanding to further ports. The scheme offers an opportunity for the industry to recycle hard plastics such as whelk pots, buoys and fish crates, as well as fishing nets.

In 2021, 1.2 tons of end-of-life fishing gear was collected from the 6 Welsh ports involved, with a report expected soon outlining the quantities and types of gear collected. The Clean Seas Partnership is working to increase capacity of the scheme to include beach litter containing fishing gear at a site both in North and South Wales. Whilst this scheme has had successes, I recognise not all fishing gear types are accepted and we need to explore how we can facilitate their disposal and recycling at our ports, through increased research and innovation.

Future intervention could potentially be provided by the Welsh Marine & Fisheries Scheme, in developing specific funding rounds following engagement from stakeholders.

### **Recommendation 6**

**The Welsh Government should provide Members with the details of the successor groups to the Wales Marine Fisheries Advisory Group. This should include remits, memberships, terms of reference and actions taken to ensure the groups are representative.**

#### **Welsh Government's response: Accept**

I chaired a discussion at the inaugural meeting of the new Ministerial Advisory Group for Welsh Fisheries on 14 July. A further meeting is scheduled in November, and the group will continue to meet quarterly.

The group will advise Ministers and officials on broader strategic fisheries issues. In establishing the Group, I was mindful of the need for it to be representative and the membership is more wide reaching than the previous group and membership will remain under review.

A paper setting out the draft Terms of Reference was discussed at the July meeting. Further iterations of the Term of Reference will be discussed at the next meeting and I will share the final version with the Committee when it has been finalised.

### **Recommendation 7**

**The Welsh Government must satisfy the Committee that the matter of the exercise of the Secretary of State's power to determine fishing opportunities has been fully resolved. In particular, the Minister must make available to Members of the Senedd details of the agreement reached with the UK Government on issues relating to the exercise of the power.**

#### **Welsh Government's response: Accept**

The establishment of the Fisheries Management and Support Framework provides a clear and robust vehicle for delivering fisheries functions across the UK and working with the other Administrations. The Framework Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) commits us

to adhere to the following principles: Fisheries management is devolved; Reserved matters; Mutual respect; Shared responsibility; Information sharing; Dispute resolution.

As well as these high-level principles, and more specifics on day-to-day decision making and dispute management, the MOU also sets out that Operational Agreements (OAs) will be developed. These OAs will be business as usual documents setting out how the FPAs will work together on specific fisheries management issues. The OAs will be the appropriate place to set out the detail on the use of the section 23 (fisheries opportunities determination power) and the consultation procedures. I will be happy to share the OAs with Committee once they are developed.