



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

WRITTEN STATEMENT BY THE WELSH ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT

Title: The Future Management and Enforcement of Sea Fisheries in Welsh Waters

Date: 12 September 2008

By: Elin Jones, Minister for Rural Affairs

In June this year, I announced that I would consult on a proposal that the Welsh Assembly Government assume full responsibility for the management and enforcement of sea fisheries in Wales. Following that consultation I have decided to adopt that proposal as Government policy, and my aim is that a new management and enforcement regime will be in place by April 2010.

The management and enforcement functions are currently carried out by the Welsh Assembly Government, by local authority Sea Fisheries Committees, and by the Environment Agency, acting as a Sea Fisheries Committee (SFC), all of which have their own legislative frameworks. This has led to confusion, not least about where ultimate responsibility lies, and a number of high profile reports concluded that a programme of change was necessary. I considered a number of options but decided to consult on my favoured option which was an in-house solution.

The consultation raised a number of concerns and I am keen to allay the fears expressed. Firstly I acknowledge and value the vast experience which the Sea Fisheries Committees and their officers have. That expertise, along with the officers' close working relationship with fishermen must not be lost, and the new WAG Fisheries Unit structure, which I envisage, will, by integrating current SFC staff into it, ensure continuity of approach. We are currently in discussion with the UK Government about conferring new legislative powers on the Welsh Ministers through the Marine Bill. Subject to those discussions and the Parliamentary process of the Marine Bill, those powers would allow

WAG, through the Fisheries Unit, to carry out the type of activities/functions that are currently carried out by the SFCs.

I am also conscious that concerns have been expressed about the role which SFCs currently play in protecting the marine environment, and the fear that the Welsh Assembly Government will not be able to replicate this. That fear is unfounded. There is a clear responsibility on the Welsh Assembly Government to comply with all of its obligations under Community law, including those relating to the environment. My officials have already begun discussions with environmental interests to ensure that the marine environment is adequately protected.

I am also sensitive to the concerns that the new regime might not have local input similar to that provided by SFCs. I believe that the involvement of local interests, in the formulation of policy and regulation, is vital. The new management and enforcement arrangements will operate on the principles of openness, transparency and inclusivity. We will need to work very closely with all sectors of the fishing industry, and I will develop mechanisms to ensure all relevant stakeholders and local interests can feed effectively into policy development and delivery.

I believe that in establishing this new management and enforcement regime we will be taking an important step towards securing the aim, of the recently published Wales Fisheries Strategy, of a sustainable, financially viable, and effectively regulated fishing industry in Wales. The development of that Strategy was achieved in partnership with all sectors of the industry, and I and my officials look forward to continuing that partnership as we work towards this new regime.