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Your Ref:
Our Ref:

Right Honourable George Eustice MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Sir,

RE: Management of the proposed Hythe Bay MCZ site

Over the last nine months local fishermen, NGOs (Kent Wildlife Trust and Marine Conservation Society), Kent & Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (KEIFCA) officers and KEIFCA members, have dedicated a lot of time and energy into developing a management solution for Hythe Bay (as outlined in 7th April 2014 press statement attached). Trying to develop management that balances the ecological value of the site with its importance to the local fishing industry has involved a lot of difficult discussions, however progress has been made and there are now firm options in the shape of a draft byelaw. Unfortunately, as management has developed, new obstacles have emerged, and without the specific support and funding from Defra as well as the ability to accurately track vessels working within the Bay, future progress will be difficult.

In developing a management solution for the Hythe Bay site a 2 km² box was identified within the species rich spoonworm community area where no bottom towed gear of any type would be used. Within this area both fishermen and NGOs agreed that research would be undertaken over a number of years to study any possible impact of light fishing gear on the spoonworm dominated community, and that this could be used to update and inform future management of the site.

Meetings were held with local fishermen, the Wildlife Trust, Natural England and Cefas to evaluate and identify the scope of this research and identify and recommend research projects. Following from a specific request from the Hythe Bay research meeting held in London on 14th November 2014, Cefas developed a number of project funding options that it sent to Defra before Christmas. To date, and to the best of my knowledge, Defra have made no indication to KEIFCA or to Cefas as to their intent to fund any of these options.

Without significant funding the experimental and evidence gathering aspect of the byelaw would be very difficult if not impossible to undertake as the costs are three to four times KEIFCA's total research reserve. Without this commitment neither the fishermen nor the Wildlife Trust would feel comfortable in supporting the solution currently suggested. Unfortunately six months after submission we are still waiting for a decision from Defra. Our key stakeholders have also asked that the report is made available for them to study.

The current proposal from Defra is that the Tranche 3 MCZ designation process (that would include a Hythe Bay proposal) would take place in 2016. If this is still the objective after the upcoming spending review, then the timing of any Minister's decision concerning Hythe Bay could start to overlap and influence any potential KEIFCA Hythe Bay byelaw as it would take another six to nine months for KEIFCA to introduce a byelaw for this site. In the light of this it might make sense to discuss this issue in more detail and synchronise the two processes.

Hythe Bay is not a designated site and there are other sites that under the European Marine Site (EMS) review process will require KEIFCA time and resource. The resource for KEIFCA to meet the Defra 2016 EMS review deadline is significant and spending considerably more resource on the Hythe Bay will take resource away from meeting this deadline (see attached table of work taken place so far). We would ask that clear direction from your department as to the importance of this site and any intentions as to possible designation, would greatly help KEIFCA prioritise our work and make sure limited resource is not wasted.

Yours faithfully



Dr Will Wright

Chief Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Officer

Attached

Defra press statement

Byelaw paper to KEIFCA (January 2015)

Byelaw paper to KEIFCA (May 2015)