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Dear IFCA Committee member,

I would like to express the Government's gratitude for the recent strides the IFCAs have made to protect our marine environment and promote sustainable fisheries. With over 24 legacy byelaws, 27 new byelaws and currently a further 10 byelaws expected by the end of 2016, the IFCAs' innovative and pioneering work has already made a significant contribution to the successful implementation of the Government's Revised Approach to the Management of Commercial Fisheries in European Marine Sites and the delivery of a well-managed UK MPA network.

We are aware that the vote to leave has raised some stakeholder concerns within the IFCAs' districts and we hope the lines below will help support the IFCAs in their work when responding to these, as well as wider queries in general:

- We are still a member of the EU and we will continue to engage with EU business and be engaged in EU decision-making in the usual way. Once Article 50 is invoked, we will remain bound by EU law until the withdrawal agreement comes into force. The period between invocation of Article 50 and our eventual exit from the EU is two years unless the other Member States agree to extend.
- European Marine Sites are a key component of the UK's national commitment to create a network of Marine Protected Areas within the UK marine area under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 and the Government's Blue Belt manifesto commitment. European Marine Sites further contribute to the UK's international commitments to help establish a well-managed network of MPAs in the North-east Atlantic under the OSPAR Convention and the Convention on Biological Diversity. We therefore expect IFCAs to continue to apply the requisite management measures to the sites in line with the current regulations.

I encourage IFCAs to raise any specific concerns they may have directly with Defra.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Gemma Harper
Deputy Director for Marine
Department of Environment, Food & Rural Affairs