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Mr Angus MacNeil MP  
House Of Commons  
LONDON  
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Your ref: AM1350  
Our ref: 2017/0000729  
25 January 2017

*Dear Angus Brendan,*

Thank you for your correspondence dated 21 December 2016 regarding management of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). I am responding because MPAs are within my portfolio.

First, I can confirm the Marine Scotland is currently finalising a report on MPA Socio-economic monitoring. I expect that report to be published shortly

Whilst new technology is available to provide high resolution positional data, this does not change the fact that demersal fishing activity has an impact on the seabed. This can be of a direct nature where the fishing gear passes over the seabed, or indirectly through disturbance of sediment which then settles on adjacent seabed. Habitats such as maerl beds are highly vulnerable to both types of disturbance.

At this point in time, I have no plans to revisit the measures put in place on 08 February and 23 March 2016, to manage fisheries within MPAs. The Wester Ross MPA, in particular, is one of only three MPAs which have recovery conservation objectives. If the obligation to improve the health of our seas is to be achieved, then measures to deliver recovery must be given time to work.

The management measures for creel fishing at East Mingulay SAC only restrict activity in 50% of the site. The other 50% remains open to creel fishing. In effect, creel fishing has exclusive access to this part of the SAC because the use of trawl gear is not permitted. Nevertheless, given the lower impact of creel fishing, and the potential for vessel monitoring, I am prepared to consider such a proposal as outlined in your letter. It would helpful if the Outer Hebrides IFG could provide details of what they have in mind to Marine Scotland.

The draft management proposal for Sound of Barra SAC is based on the best available evidence on the distribution of vulnerable habitats, and the effects that scallop dredging has upon those habitats. The consultation will provide the opportunity for alternative approaches to be put forward, whether they relate to the specific measures themselves or how we can

empower communities to be involved. An economic assessment of these further MPA management proposals will be made available at the time of the consultation.

Proposals for alternative measures will have a better chance of succeeding if they are accompanied by scientific evidence that informs current thinking on the environmental impact of scallop dredging and other fishing gears.

*Yours*

*Roseanna*

**Roseanna Cunningham**