

# The Association of Sea Fisheries Committees of England and Wales

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## **THE FUTURE MANAGEMENT AND ENFORCEMENT OF SEA FISHERIES IN WELSH WATERS**

At last week's meeting of the Association of Sea Fisheries Committees of England and Wales I was asked to write to you to say that while we recognise fully the political decision you have announced that will take the functions and staff of the Sea Fisheries Committees in Wales away from the local authorities and into the Welsh Assembly Government we are very concerned about the nature of the ill informed consultation document which preceded the decision.

The consultation document was very thin on facts, costs and reality. In particular – and this may well have swayed respondents to the consultation – it averred that there were instances where some SFCs have failed to act to prevent possible damage, from fishing operations, to habitats or species in areas designated under the Habitats Directive. This came as news to us. Indeed, enquiries made under the Freedom of Information Act produced nothing more than papers relating to one case dating from 2002 where the European Commission issued a reasoned opinion about an alleged failure of one Sea Fisheries Committee in Wales and of central Government in Wales to apply the Birds Directive or the Habitats and Species Directive properly in one particular instance. At the time the legal advice available to central government and from central Government about the Habitats Directive was that no public fishery management action was a 'plan or project'. It is therefore a poor example to use to illustrate any shortcomings of SFCs in Wales and hardly a sound platform from which to drive root and branch reform.

The Association works for sustainable management of inshore waters. It represents the interests of the 12 Sea Fisheries Committees of England and Wales which manage those waters through powers conferred by Act of Parliament. Its associate members include the Fisheries Departments of the Isle of Man, Guernsey and Jersey

Far more important than this blip is the apparent steadfast refusal to recognise that it is only because of the Sea Fisheries Committees' custodianship of the inshore zone for the past 120 years or so that the quality of the area is so high that it really is of international significance and thus proper to protect under EU legislation. Without the Sea Fisheries Committees' continuum of constructive management it is probable that there would be little that warranted designation.

However, you have made your decision and it is now up to you and your officials to build a new piece of government machinery that will deliver effective management of the very sensitive inshore zone in the way that the National Assembly feels is needed in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

**P. D. Winterbottom**