

Victoria Prentis MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Minister for Farming, Fisheries and Food
Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

25th May 2021

Dear Ms. Prentis,

Devon & Severn Inshore Fisheries & Conservation Authority (D&SIFCA)

Thank you for your letter of the 19th May 2021, receipt of which is acknowledged. I can confirm that I and the Authority's Chief Officer, Mr. Mat Mander, will engage in dialogue with Ms. Muckle and her colleagues from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) with a view to examining the options for a resolution of this matter. We look forward to Ms. Muckle convening a mutually convenient meeting to start what will hopefully be more meaningful discussions. Ms Muckle will already be fully cognisant of the detailed financial issues that D&SIFCA face, having been involved in inconclusive discussions with the Chief Officer and I since 2019.

However, I would point out that the issue stems entirely from Defra's failure in 2010 to take account of the increased area of D&SIFCA compared to that of its predecessor, the Devon Sea Fisheries Committee. This in turn resulted in Defra's creation of a funding formula which is, beyond disputation, not fit for purpose. This failure was subsequently compounded by the basis upon which New Burdens Funding is calculated and distributed, a basis which Defra continues to be unable to explain in a coherent manner. Moreover, these failings have been known to Defra since 2011, when the IFCA's first budget was vetoed by the funding Local Authorities. I also note your statement that Defra officials have been in regular dialogue with colleagues in MHCLG since 2019. That may be the case but, from a D&SIFCA perspective, it has led to no discernible progress whatsoever towards resolving the matter.

On this basis I regret to say that Defra's Marine and Fisheries team does not enjoy the confidence of the Authority's Chair and Senior Management Team when it comes to its capability to address this issue in an effective and timely manner. I also note that, since this issue is occasioned by the above systemic failures on the part of Defra, they can only be resolved by Defra through amendment of the Statutory Instrument that created D&SIFCA and only the Secretary of State can effect such an amendment. To that end the resolution of the matter is beyond the power of D&SIFCA to resolve and an immediate dialogue between Defra, MHCLG and the Authority's funding Local Authorities might have been considered a more logical and productive step forward.

There remains the very real probability that the Authority's proposed budget for FY 2022 – 23 will be vetoed by the D&SIFCA's funding Local Authorities, in which case D&SIFCA will be unable to set a revenue budget. This would almost certainly result in D&SIFCA having to

cease operations within approximately six months of the start of the FY 2022-23. Additionally, even if a revenue budget were to be agreed, I am increasingly concerned for the welfare of the staff as they are expected to work under increasingly challenging conditions when clearly they do not have the level of financial resourcing that other IFCA's or comparable national regulators, such as Natural England, enjoy.

Accordingly I now seek your written assurance that Defra is cognisant of this potential outcome and that Defra's Marine and Fisheries team will now afford this matter the priority that it merits.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mr Williams', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Prof. Michael V. Williams

Chair

Devon & Severn IFCA

Cc Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP, Rt Hon Philip Dunne MP, Luke Pollard MP, Neil Parish MP