

Màiri McAllan
Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Just Transition
The Scottish Government

By email

14 April 2023

Dear Cabinet Secretary,

Highly Protected Marine Areas Consultation

I am writing to provide written input to the consultation on proposals to designate at least 10% of Scotland's seas as Highly Protected Marine Areas.

For background, Scotland Food & Drink is the leadership body for the food and drink industry in Scotland, working in partnership with businesses, trade bodies and the public sector to responsibly grow its value and reputation.

We recognise the need to act swiftly to address the climate challenge and support the Scottish Government's National Just Transition Outcomes as well as the aims and principles of the National Strategy for Economic Transformation.

We are finalising a refreshed food and drink industry strategy for Scotland which has been developed by the Scotland Food & Drink Partnership, including the Scottish Government. The strategy and accompanying delivery plans will place a significant focus on achieving our environmental and social goals to complement our important work to support businesses, jobs, and communities through economic growth.

Food and drink businesses are the lifeblood of our communities, particularly in our remote and rural areas. As you will know, they have been severely impacted by the major economic shocks caused by Covid-19, leaving the EU single market and now, an inflation and cost of living crisis. These challenges are likely to remain in place for some time.

We have noticed increasing levels of concern about the potential impact of HPMAs on communities, businesses and individuals who rely on our sea-based economy. These concerns have been raised across the political spectrum and by many of the affected communities, businesses, and local governments.

We believe valid questions have been raised around the evidence base and legal framework as well as the potentially adverse impact on economic activity.

Regarding this, we welcome the assurances you gave in your Ministerial Foreword for the consultation and during the meeting of the parliament on 21 March 2023:

"Our seas must remain a source of economic prosperity for the nation, especially in our remote, coastal and island communities."

"The socioeconomic factors that affect the resilience of marine industries, fishers and coastal communities will be taken into account."

Your comments align with wording in the Bute House Agreement in relation to HPMA, and we understand this is a key driver for this piece of legislation. It is unclear what “taken into account” means but our view is that this must include being prepared to adapt the plans in the face of the growing evidence of impacts.

We ask that you continue to engage in dialogue with all those affected, and that you take every effort to avoid economic harms where reasonable alternatives exist, such as a smaller scale launch to build the evidence base alongside encouraging continued efforts to embed sustainability across our food and drink industry, at sea and on the land. We are committed to working jointly on these efforts and are always willing to consider new methods to improve how we achieve this.

The published “national outcomes” for a Just Transition includes the need to

support a strong, dynamic and productive economy which creates wealth and high quality employment across Scotland, upholds the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and continues to make Scotland a great place to do business.

We recognise that balancing a strong, productive economy with our rightly ambitious environmental and social ambitions presents an ongoing challenge and will require difficult decisions at times. It is therefore vital that all stakeholders collaborate to explore solutions which truly provide that balance.

Any regulatory change that reduces Scotland’s production capacity for food or drink is of concern to us. We want people across Scotland and across the world to enjoy our world class, sustainably made produce. Any measures which potentially harm our ability to achieve this must be considered extremely carefully and any transition must be made over a reasonable timeframe, use robust evidence, and wherever possible avoid risking livelihoods and the income which keeps our rural and island communities viable and allows Scotland to invest in a brighter future for all.

Yours sincerely,



John Davidson

Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Strategy

CC. Mairi Gougeon, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands