

**Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales
Y Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, Amgylchedd a Materion Gwledig | Climate
Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee
Effaith Brexit ar bysgodfeydd yng Nghymru | The impact of Brexit on
fisheries in Wales**

FW 04

**Ymateb gan : Cymdeithas Rheoli Gorchymyn Pysgodfa Afon Menai
Evidence from : Menai Strait Fishery Order Management Association**

We are writing in response to the call for written evidence about the impact of Brexit on fisheries in Wales that was circulated in May 2018.

The Menai Strait Fishery Order Management Association (MSFOMA) was established in 2010 to oversee the management of mussel cultivation in the eastern Menai Strait. This part of the Menai Strait is the most productive shellfish farming location in the United Kingdom, which has been operating for over 50 years. It was also the first shellfish farming area in the world to attain the sustainability standard set by the Marine Stewardship Council for sustainable fishery operations in 2010.

The Menai Strait regularly produces several thousand tonnes of farmed mussels each year. Most of the mussels that we grow are exported fresh from the quayside in Port Penrhyn directly to our customers in Europe.

We therefore consider that we have some valuable expertise both in our sector and with regard to trade with the EU that can helpfully inform the Committee's deliberations on the impacts (and opportunities) of Brexit.

We have presented some of our views briefly below and would welcome the opportunity to participate further in discussions of this important matter.

1. To what extent do current Welsh fisheries policies and wider management measures deliver desired outcomes?

We were optimistic about the delivery of desired outcomes when the Welsh Government worked with us to establish MSFOMA in 2010 and subsequently in the *Wales Marine and Fisheries Strategic Action Plan* set out its target to double shellfish aquaculture to produce 16,000t by 2020. At that time in 2013 we considered that this was an ambitious but achievable target.

In the subsequent years the objectives for development of the fisheries sector have not been delivered. Our own experience of the implementation of the national policy for fishery development has been disappointing and frustrating: despite the support of the local Assembly

Member and a green light from Natural Resources Wales we are still working to renew the small shellfish farming area in the western Menai Strait.

The lack of progress shellfish farming sector in Wales contrasts to progress in other aspects of the marine economy in Wales. When we started work on the renewal of the shellfish farming area in the western Menai Strait several years ago there were no offshore windfarms along the North Wales coast. Today there are several enormous windfarms, and now an experimental tidal energy scheme; but still no renewal of a small shellfish farming area. Over the same period we have also seen the creation of new Natura 2000 sites for the protection of marine wildlife.

The stagnation of the shellfish farming sector in Wales also contrasts to the situation in England and also in Ireland. Ireland will soon eclipse Wales as the most important mussel producing country in the British Isles.

Despite this, we still feel that there is tremendous potential for developing shellfish cultivation in Wales. The recent Draft Welsh National Marine Plan showed the extent of the “Strategic Resource Area” for aquaculture in the sea area around Wales. The area is vast, and the shellfish farming industry is keen to work with the Welsh Government to release the potential of our seas to create high quality shellfish sustainably and to create secure jobs in coastal communities.

The target of doubling shellfish production by 2020 cannot now be met. Rather than regarding this as a failure, we feel that the Government and policy makers should see this as an opportunity to learn, to reset the clock, and to try again. We know that Welsh shellfish farmers all want to achieve this target. With the right commitment from Government we are sure that it could be met in a very short time – perhaps as early as 2025.

We therefore urge this Committee to review and re-set the Government’s policies for shellfish production for the benefit of the industry, local people, and the Welsh economy.

2. What outcomes and policies does Wales want to see from the UK Fisheries Bill? How can policy best reflect the needs of different sectors, including the fishing industry, aquaculture and coastal communities?

Most of the fishermen operating in Wales (ourselves included) catch non-quota species. These fishermen will not be affected by EU-UK arrangements for managing quota species such as cod, mackerel, or herring. The big issues facing most of the Welsh fishing and aquaculture sector post-Brexit will not be about access to stocks; it will be about access to markets.

Any post-Brexit changes to tariffs on trade with the EU and also hygiene checks of our product at Border Inspection Posts would be a major challenge. A favourable outcome to Brexit negotiations on these two issues will be vital to all Welsh fishing sectors and coastal communities.

In our view it is imperative that the settlement between the EU and UK must secure tariff-free trade with our existing customers in Europe; and it must also ensure that the fresh mussels that we export to Europe can continue to cross the Channel swiftly without being delayed by border inspections.

Although it cannot address these particular issues the UK Fisheries Bill provides a vital opportunity for ensuring that the legislative and administrative environment in which UK non-

quota fishermen (including shellfish farmers) can operate competitively, whatever the outcome of the wider negotiations on border controls and trade tariffs. We feel that there is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to streamline UK fisheries administration and make UK non-quota fisheries more competitive.

We have direct experience of the management regimes for shellfish cultivation in Ireland, the Netherlands, Denmark, Germany and other European countries. In these countries the national management regime is more dynamic and less bureaucratic than the UK system. If the UK fails to update its approach, then this sector will be at a huge disadvantage to our competitors in Europe.

We feel that the legislative foundation for shellfish cultivation in England & Wales (the Sea Fisheries (Shellfish) Act 1967) is capable of delivering what is required to transform the management and development of this sector with just a few relatively minor changes. The key areas that we feel should be addressed in the UK Fisheries Bill could include:-

- Creating a clearer process (and in particular setting deadlines for Government action) for the creation of new shellfish farming areas (known as Several Areas in this Shellfish Act);
- Introducing a formal “screening” stage for Several Area applications early in the process to allow nature conservation agencies and other statutory consultees to give “in principle” support for applications; and
- Updating the process for wider stakeholder consultation on the creation of Several areas to both provide for earlier engagement and also to avoid delays in the process.

We cannot stress highly enough that the national regime for developing shellfish cultivation in England and Wales does not allow us to compete on a level playing field with our European competitors. We would urge the Committee to use the opportunity of the UK Fisheries Bill to address this issue.

3. What are the main challenges and opportunities for fisheries during the transition period and post-Brexit?

Our comments above cover this question.

In brief, the main challenges will lie in the potential effect of Brexit on export trade. The Welsh shellfish industry (both for wild and cultivated species) depends very much on tariff-free trade with Europe and border controls that allow for the export of live shellfish. If either of these aspects of European trade is compromised, the future of the Welsh aquaculture sector, and indeed most fishermen in Wales, will be in doubt.

The key opportunity presented by Brexit is as a catalyst for streamlining and updating of the management regime for inshore fisheries. There are particular opportunities for the Welsh shellfish cultivation industry that would be easy to achieve (through amendments to UK legislation and a refresh of Welsh Government policy) and which would enable the Welsh Government to start to deliver on the objective of doubling the output of farmed shellfish. Such changes would help our industry to keep pace with our competitors in Ireland.

**4. How effective is the Welsh Government's engagement with the UK Government on fisheries?
Are Welsh interests being given sufficient consideration within the Brexit negotiations**

We have no direct experience of the Welsh Government's engagement with the UK Government, so cannot comment on this matter.

We hope that these comments are helpful. We would very much welcome the opportunity to work with the Committee to help develop Government policy in this area. We would be happy to attend meetings in Cardiff, and would also extend an open invitation to all members of the Committee to visit Port Penrhyn in North Wales to see how we grow and harvest mussels sustainably here.

If you have any queries at all or require any clarification of the points raised in this response please do not hesitate to get in touch with me.

ALAN WINSTONE
Chair, MSFOMA
