



Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs

The Rt. Hon. Mark Spencer MP
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Mr Jacob Jensen
Minister for Food, Agriculture
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Holbergsgade 6
1057 Copenhagen K
Denmark

27 February 2024

Dear Jacob,

Thank you for your letter of 1st February about our decision to close English waters of the North Sea to fishing for sandeel.

I understand you are disappointed with the decision, and I appreciate that there are consequences for the Danish fishing sector who presently fish for sandeel. The UK's decision has been made after several years of policy development and consideration of the best available evidence including a public call for evidence and a consultation in which both the Danish government and fishing and processing sectors participated. Following our exchange of correspondence in 2023 and subsequent meeting on 19 September 2023, I agreed to postpone the closure decision until after the ICES advice in response to the joint UK-EU technical request was received. Both the ICES report and wider evidence support the closure decision. In reaching our decision, we considered a range of alternative measures, but they failed to provide sufficient protection to vulnerable seabird populations. The reasons for our decision are set out in the UK Government's response to our sandeel management consultation^(a).

Under the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement, both Parties are permitted to introduce fisheries management measures in their waters which are pursuant to the objectives and have regard to the principles in the Fisheries Heading. We will, of course, continue to ensure decisions affecting UK and EU vessels are informed by the best available scientific evidence base, and balance the needs to support sustainable fish populations with wider interests. However, while I acknowledge the impact on the Danish fishing sector, I am satisfied that this decision is neither discriminatory nor disproportionate having regard to the important aim the ban seeks to achieve.

It is regrettable that technical measures and possible alternatives to a ban were not raised in previous discussions between our teams. However, in the interest of close and constructive cooperation between the UK and Denmark my officials are open to a meeting with your officials, though it would be helpful if your team could please identify specific points they would like to discuss in advance to make the discussion as constructive as possible for both teams. I should make it clear though that this will not alter the decision for the closure to come into effect on 26 March 2024.

Yours sincerely,

(a) <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-spatial-management-measures-for-industrial-sandeel-fishing/outcome/government-response>.

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