Dear Neil,

Thank you for your well wishes on my recent appointment in your letter of March 13th regarding the UK’s application to the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC).

You enquired about the possible impact of a gap in NEAFC membership on UK vessels’ access to fish stocks in NEAFC waters in terms of lost catching opportunities. We intend to reduce the NEAFC parties’ suggested 90 day period of consideration through ongoing dialogue, building on the mutual interest of all parties to guarantee continuity. Those other parties also want to minimise any gap in order to ensure continuity and stability and, to remain in line with their obligations to conservation and fisheries management under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). To add, a gap in membership would only prevent the UK from accessing international waters. UK industry would still be able to fish in UK waters, where the vast majority quota is landed from.

In the event of a short gap, the UK Government would work with industry, in particular affected fleets who make use of the provisions under NEAFC to mitigate any impact. We will consider all possible options to ensure continuity for businesses in the event of any gap in membership, including activity that industry can take whilst still covered by the existing agreement. The Government has kept the Devolved Administrations informed and will continue to do so as needed moving forwards, including if there is a gap in membership.

You also asked if there are any ports which might be disproportionately affected by any temporary loss of catching opportunities. The effect of a gap in NEAFC membership and a resulting inability to land NEAFC regulated stocks from international waters into UK ports would be minimal. There are no ports which would be disproportionately affected.

You enquired about a fishing rights and the London Fisheries Convention. The UK formally gave notice under the London Fisheries Convention of its intention to withdraw from the
LFC on 3 July 2017, triggering a two-year withdrawal period, which will come to an end on 2 July 2019. Until that date, Member States with rights under the Convention would continue to have fishing rights for specific stocks in specific areas of the UK 6-12 mile zone. UK vessels would also continue to have access rights to other Member States’ waters under the Convention. Any rights to fish after this period or to fish in the 12-200 mile zone will be a matter for negotiation.

I hope I have answered your queries and my officials will be happy to discuss any further questions you or colleagues may have should they arise.

Best Wishes,

[Signature]

Robert Goodwill