Thank you for your letter of 5 April about the labour needs of the fishing industry in Northern Ireland. I apologise for the delay in my response.

The Government is listening carefully to the concerns of the UK fishing industry about availability of labour. Before publishing its report last September, the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) took evidence from a wide range of organisations and individuals and visited every region of the United Kingdom. This of course included talking to representatives of the fishing sector. I have also personally visited a number of fishing communities in both Scotland and Northern Ireland, and I was able to listen at first hand to the concerns of those working in those industries.

The MAC was clear in its advice to the Government last autumn that there was no case for schemes for particular sectors in the immigration system, with the possible exception of agriculture, which has some unique characteristics. The Government has accepted this recommendation and it is right that Governments should avoid picking particular sectors of the economy for special treatment. However, both the Home Secretary and I are keen to fully understand what measures might most appropriately assist the UK fishing industry.

Getting the UK’s future skills-based immigration system right for all employers is vital for the success and prosperity of the United Kingdom and for future generations. On Wednesday 19 December the Government published a White Paper, setting out the Government’s proposals for the United Kingdom’s future skills-based immigration system after our exit from the European Union.
The proposals set out in the White Paper provide a platform for further discussion. The Home Office is undertaking an extensive 12-month programme of engagement with a wide range of stakeholders across the UK, including of course the fishing sector. We have also launched a range of new advisory groups on key proposals for the future system to ensure we understand unique perspectives and listen to views, while making best use of and building on existing forums. To date there have already been more than 45 engagement events, and we have taken evidence from 650 different organisations or individuals in the first three months of this year alone. I am grateful that the fishing industry is taking an active part in this process. Indeed, the Home Secretary met representatives of Thistle Seafoods and the Scottish Fishermen's Federation in Aberdeen on 3 May and Home Office Officials met with the Northern Ireland Fish Producers Organisation in April. This work will continue throughout the remainder of this year.

Rt Hon Caroline Nokes MP
Minister of State for Immigration