I am writing to thank you for the opportunity to give evidence to your Committee's inquiry looking at the implications of Brexit for the fishing industry in Northern Ireland. During the proceedings, I undertook to provide further information on a few matters which were raised during the evidence session. This also addresses the question raised in your letter to Secretary of State of 22 May 2018 to which the Secretary of State has asked me to reply.

First, I would like to reassure you that the UK Government remains committed to the principles behind the Voisinage Agreement and to protecting and supporting continued cooperation between Northern Ireland and Ireland. We are keen to explore possible solutions to make sure that the agreement can be reinstated as quickly as possible and that it can benefit both Irish and Northern Irish fishers.

We have engaged with ministers and officials in Ireland on a number of occasions since the suspension of the agreement. I met with Michael Creed, the Irish Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, on 3 April 2017, and we informally discussed the matter again at the EU Agriculture and Fisheries Council on 6 November 2017. The Secretary of State also discussed the matter in a telephone conversation on 5 July 2017. He was also due to meet Minister Creed in Ireland in November, and again at the beginning of May this year, but unfortunately the meetings had to be postponed. A new meeting is now scheduled for 13 June in London where the matter will be raised. Officials have also raised the matter on separate occasions.

I have recently written to Minister Creed to voice our concerns and emphasise that we will not be able to accept unequal application of the agreement indefinitely. The Secretary of State will also raise the issue with Minister Creed when they meet.

Secondly, I undertook to provide further information on the border Loughs, Foyle and Carlingford. The future jurisdiction question extends beyond fisheries and therefore is the responsibility of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

The UK Government remains committed to protecting the Belfast ('Good Friday') Agreement and preserving North-South cooperation. This includes ensuring that the North-South
Implementation Bodies established under the Belfast Agreement can continue to operate effectively. The Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission (the Loughs Agency) is one of these bodies. The functions of the Loughs Agency are set out in the North/South Co-operation (Implementation Bodies) (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 and the British Irish Agreement Act 1999.

The Loughs Agency’s aim is to conserve, protect, manage and promote the fisheries and marine resources the Foyle and Carlingford Lough areas. We remain fully committed to these arrangements and continue to work closely with the Irish Government on the management of the Loughs in a pragmatic fashion. This is particularly evident in the aquaculture licensing regime which currently exists in Carlingford Lough, as the navigational channel there provides a natural demarcation line to facilitate licensing by both Governments.

Whilst there are no current discussions with Ireland on the delimitation of the boundaries in Lough Foyle and Carlingford Lough, there are ongoing discussions on the management of aquaculture activities, particularly in Lough Foyle.

Thirdly, as regards engagement with representatives of the Northern Irish industry. I have consulted with the Northern Ireland Office, and I can confirm that Lord Duncan visited the Anglo Irish Fish Producers Organisation in Kilkeel in January 2018. As indicated during the session, I would be happy to meet with representatives of the Northern Ireland industry.

GEORGE EUSTICE MP