



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

22 September 2022

Ranil Jayawardena MP
Secretary of State
DEFRA
Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Dear Ranil

Submission to the consultation on the proposed Highly Protected Marine Area (HPMA) for Lindisfarne

I am writing in response to Defra's consultation into the socio-economic impact of imposing a High Protected Marine Area (HPMA) at Lindisfarne, also known as Holy Island. Such a course of action would ban all present forms of fishing, including recreational angling in the waters surrounding the island, bringing to an abrupt end to centuries of tradition and livelihood for many of the island's inhabitants. To say the Island would be devastated should this proposed HPMA be introduced is perhaps an understatement as I shall set out below. My submission is based upon my own views, as well as those of residents whom I have surveyed, the Parish Council, members of the fishing community and the Northumberland branch of the Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (NIFCA) whose own detailed response is attached.

Unique history and geography of Lindisfarne

I feel immensely fortunate to represent the unique community of Lindisfarne in Parliament, one of the most incredible communities within the UK and home to around 160 permanent residents. The island itself is just under a mile off mainland Northumberland, accessible only via a causeway at low tide. I have also attached a link to the tide timetable as it is crucial in understanding how isolated the community can become, and why the local economy is dependent on economic activity on Lindisfarne itself.

The Priory at Lindisfarne (now run by English Heritage) was established by monks in 635AD who were joined by Cuthbert decades later. The shrine of St Cuthbert and the vital place Lindisfarne occupies within the history of early Christianity in England means the Island is a huge draw, not only for regular tourists but those making pilgrimage to the Priory ruins. The Island attracts around 650,000 tourists annually, who not only come to experience the historic ruins the Island is custodian to, but the ongoing vibrant community who make it their home. Fishing is a central part of that community.

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*I send a regular e-newsletter to keep residents informed of the work I do in Parliament and locally.
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Economic impact on fishermen of proposed HPMA

It needs to be stated clearly and repeatedly that the waters surrounding Lindisfarne are (rightly) already heavily regulated and existing fishing is already very low impact. There is very little recreational angling due to the limited access to the island as set out above, the impact of which would be negligible.

The only commercial fishing that takes place in the proposed candidate Lindisfarne HPMA area is lobster and crab potting, done from small vessels, all of which are under 12m and most are around 6m, which are crewed by no more than 3 people. It is very much in the interest of these crews to fish sustainably, and all catch which cannot be landed is immediately returned to sea. The huge resurgence in the local seal population in the area is proof of the existing balance between commercial fishing and sustainability and stocks are healthy.

The NIFCA estimates there are only 33 potting vessels operating across the proposed Lindisfarne HPMA coming from Holy Island, Berwick, Seahouses, Eyemouth and Burnmouth. They have outlined the full economic impact of the HPMA on those vessels and the impact that would have on the wider economy in their submission, but they estimate the annual loss to just the vessels based on Holy Island alone is £1.1million, which for a tiny community is an enormous blow.

This is not to mention the significant investment already made by those crews in their vessels and pots and other fishing gear (a pot costs around £100 and each fisherman is likely to own hundreds); the loss to the harbour in dues; impact on local pot makers and the loss to merchants and wholesalers.

Could the existing potting fleet move on to grounds beyond the proposed HPMA? Not easily or without vast expense. Again, the NIFCA submission explores the possibilities and associated challenges and knock-on effects in great detail, but ultimately there is no viable space in surrounding fishing grounds. The historical nature of fishing off the Northumberland coast means fishing grounds remain within families and communities and are passed down to the stewards of the next generation. To displace those who have fished sustainably in the waters off Lindisfarne for hundreds of years would upset the existing balance of both sustainable fishing and community relations. These ancient rites are part of the fabric of the community and again are part of its unique heritage and draw for tourists.

As many residents and fishermen told me in my survey, there is no viable alternative in terms of fishing grounds, and there is no other viable employment on the island. They and their families would likely have to leave the island altogether, as commuting is unworkable given the tide times. The overwhelming message from residents to my survey was utter dismay at the realisation that a fishing ban would devastate their island community:

Parish Council Clerk, John Bevan said: “[The proposal would have a] Devastating impact on local businesses and employment. No fishing would mean families would have to leave the island.”

Another resident said: “The fishing industry provides much needed well-paid work and supports a number of local families both directly and indirectly. Banning fishing would send a strong message that the human history and community on Holy Island are not important. The restrictions would have little to no impact on the environment in the area.”



A local fishman told me: "Our fishery is extremely healthy. We have cooperated with all recent bans – on scallops, no trawling and returning egg-bearing females. Our industry has overcome covid, 'Brexit', soaring fuel costs and devastating storm Arwen. A ban would have a direct effect on tourism, I am 58, if I lose my job what else can I do? Bait used in pots is beneficial to the marine life in the area. DEFRA used VSM Data from other sites to determine Holy Island ban! No consideration made for local industry."

One resident summarised the situation thus: "Fishing from the island has gone on for 100s of years. Recently only potting for lobster and crab...but this must be being done in a sustainable manner or the fishermen would not still have a population of lobster and crab to continue to fish. They are not going to fish in a way that kills their own livelihood. All but 2 of the fleet are not big enough boats to fish outside the proposed protected zone and even for those it would not be economically viable to do so given the distance and cost of diesel for poorer yields than current areas."

"No fishing would mean young families would suddenly have lost their main income. Forcing a move to the mainland. This would impact our school, the coastguard, the population of able-bodied younger adults who do so much around the village and family members who provide staff for other places on the island."

Effect on economy of the island

The community of Lindisfarne is small in number and finely balanced. The tide times and nature of access to the island mean most economically active residents work on the island itself, mostly supporting the tourism outlined above. The fishermen on the island are not standalone community members – their families have vital roles too.

A fishing ban would have an obvious impact on those restaurants, cafes and other businesses selling freshly caught crab and lobster which is one of the primary draws for tourists who would undoubtedly face supply issues or must amend their offering, much graver would be their ability to staff their businesses.

One publican told me: "My business is staffed by families of fishermen living locally on the island."

The tourism industry of the Island would be severely limited by the proposed HPMA, with the exodus of staff from the Island. The knock-on effects to the hospitality businesses that remain are very serious.

Another resident captures the concerns thus: "I own a sustainable fishery that cares and supports our local environment. As the wife of a fisherman a ban on fishing will mean we leave the island taking our 2-year-old son with us. My husband is a third-generation fisherman, and he owns his business and has worked hard and successfully. At 52, he would be on minimum wage in a dead-end job, that would most likely be seasonal. The island will lose families, future pupils for the school, parish councillors, chefs, first responders and coastguards, as well as fishermen. There would be no viable community left."

Another resident said: "Our area survives on tourism, the vast majority of whom visit because of recreational fishing, boat trips to the Farne Islands and diving. Without anyone of these our entire community will fail. We have a small but viable fishing fleet; they cannot have any other restrictions placed on them."

Dangerous impact on emergency services provision

As alluded to above, the tide-affected entry restrictions to the Island mean the safety of the community depends on volunteers – made up of local residents – serving as volunteer first responders. Most of them are fishermen – the members of the community who would almost certainly have to leave the island should Defra's proposed HPMA come into effect.

Most dangerous in my view, is that the majority of the coastguard provision for Holy Island is from local fishermen. The safety of the Islanders and all visitors to it, is dependent on those coastguards who also attend medical call outs when the tide has closed access to the island.

A local fisherman told me: "The Coast Guard Station Officer, Harbour Master and myself (Deputy Station Officer) are all fishermen and we are also coastguards and **first responders for the North East Ambulance Service**. If the fishing ban was to go ahead, we would need to work off the Island to earn enough money to survive. Therefore, taking those vital community roles away straightaway. The other member of our team is the wife of a fisherman who would also plan to leave the island. That is 3 or the 4 members of the team.

"We attend a lot of medical callouts when no one else can get to the island, so it is vital this service is kept going. If we lose our coastguards and first responders – that will have a knock-on effect for the village."

It is extremely concerning that the Island will effectively be left with no emergency response provision during high tide times. The impact on this for the remaining residents is deeply troubling. I understand the North East Ambulance Service is also concerned about what this would mean and is preparing their own submission to the consultation. **I would be very interested to know what work Defra has done to examine the impact and legal position in removing the income of the only source of emergency response provision to the Island during periods of high tide.**

Impact on viability of the Island's school

The island's small school would almost certainly be very badly affected and may no longer be viable if the children of fishing families would be forced to leave the area. This is very worrying for other families and their concerns about having to travel off the island somehow for their children's schooling. It could be that other families are forced to leave the Island altogether simply because without a school on the Island itself, they would have no choice, and of course the ramifications of that would further affect the local economy.



One resident confirmed this fear in my survey: "The school will lose most of its pupils, the community will lose most of the fit young men who do all sorts of jobs that the lesser able cannot do. Their family members are part of the huge hospitality business on the Island."

Another resident said: "Taking away fishermen would also impact schools on the island as most of the children come from fishing families. HMPA would remove the cultural heritage of the island and destroy local businesses."

Without the school, the attractiveness and viability of the Island as a place for young families to live is lost, further damaging its future as a proper community.

Conclusion and invitation

To conclude, it is hard to quantify the socio-economic impact the proposed HPMA would have on Holy Island, because fishing IS the Island, and has been for centuries. It is part of what draws visitors to the Island, it is the income of many families and their reason for being on the Island. Removing this key strand of island life would take with it key emergency service and coastguard provision, hospitality workers, most of the school pupils, young able-bodied people. Hospitality businesses would be forced to close, causing even more people to leave the island in search of an alternative livelihood. The community would be decimated, and for no real benefit. The area is already extremely lightly fished by small crab and lobster vessels by fishermen who rely on conservation for their livelihoods in waters teeming with catch as evidenced by the thriving and growing seal population.

The HPMA is not needed and is certainly not wanted and would instantly put an end to centuries of tradition on Lindisfarne, turning the island into a museum exhibit rather than a living, breathing community.

I would like to invite you or a member of your ministerial team to join me on a visit to meet the community for yourself, so you can better understand the strength of feeling involved.

Yours ever

Encl. NIFCA consultation response

Holy Island tide timetable