



Environmental Audit Committee

Oral evidence: [Marine Protected Areas](#), HC 914

Wednesday 2 April 2014

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Written evidence from witnesses:

– [Defra](#)

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Members present: Joan Walley (Chair), Peter Aldous, Neil Carmichael, Martin Caton, Zac Goldsmith, Mike Kane, Caroline Lucas, Caroline Nokes, Dr Alan Whitehead, Simon Wright.

Questions 120–166

Witnesses: **George Eustice MP**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Farming, Food and Marine Environment, DEFRA, and **Professor Ian Boyd**, Chief Scientific Adviser, DEFRA gave evidence.

Q120 Chair: Can I thank you both, Minister and Professor Boyd, for appearing before us this afternoon to discuss marine conservation zones? We want to start off by asking you about the evidence base for the work that the Department has been doing. In the evidence we have had before, we have been very conscious that when the policy was first announced the aim seemed to be to have somewhere around 120 sites designated. Now what we have is much less than that—we have 27, with perhaps another 37 on the way. We would like your perspective on why we do not have the full amount of anticipated zones that we thought we would have at the start of this process.

George Eustice: The first thing to say is we decided in the end that it would be better to do these in tranches rather than try to dub 127 sites in one go. We felt it would be better to do it in stages so that the IFCAs, who will be leading on a lot of this work, particularly the inshore ones, have time to put in place meaningful management measures and to work closely with stakeholders, local fishermen and NGOs locally to make sure they get those management measures absolutely right. Rather than putting all that in one go and creating a huge workload for the IFCAs, it makes sense to do it in tranches, to protect the credibility of the process.

We have made it clear that there are 27 to start. The fact that we have indicated another 37 sites that we are already looking at or are already under review is proof that we are serious about doing that second tranche, and we will start formally consulting on that next year.

We have always made it clear that we intend to do a third tranche. That is the reason we have chosen to do it in stages.

Q121 Chair: I think that kind of incremental approach is one that the Committee would understand and accept as long as there was an end destination and an understanding of tranche 1, tranche 2 and tranche 3. The absence of seeing what the end amount is going to look like with any degree of certainty creates issues. How would you respond to that?

George Eustice: Ian, did you want to come in?

Professor Boyd: Sure. As the Minister said, we are in the middle of a process here. We start with 127 candidates, but we do not have all the evidence to say that those candidates are appropriate to be designated as MCZs. What we have to do is go through an evidence-gathering process, which in some cases is a matter of consulting the scientific literature. In other cases, it is a matter of consulting the stakeholders, and in other cases it is a matter of going out there and looking at the sites themselves.

I will give you a particular example. Marine models were used to try to understand where the best sites were for best habitats. Those are just simply models and for some of them we went and looked in those areas and did not find the features that the models suggested within some of those 127 sites. Under those circumstances, there is absolutely no point in designating those as sites.

You asked about destination. The destination is going to be somewhere between the 27 we already have and the 127, but it will not be 127 because some of those candidate sites simply did not have the feature that we were hoping they would have.

Q122 Chair: In terms of timeline, time of arrival at that final number—when?

George Eustice: We have been clear. For the second tranche, we have already identified 37 candidate sites and we will be doing further investigative work to identify those that have the features we most want to protect, with a view to consulting on the next tranche at the beginning of next year and implementing it later next year.

Q123 Chair: When would you expect to be at a position where you have the full amount that you are going to designate in place and fully designated?

George Eustice: I would anticipate, under our current plan, by the end of 2016 because we basically envisage doing one tranche per year. Coming back to what Ian—

Q124 Chair: Sorry, one tranche a year?

George Eustice: One tranche a year. We have just finished one. We are going to consult on another one at the beginning of next year.

Q125 Chair: When would we be on 127?

George Eustice: I am not going to give the figure of 127 because, as Ian said, we will only—

Chair: Or thereabouts.

George Eustice: We have been clear that we intend to do three tranches of broadly similar sizes. We have in mind at the moment consulting on the third tranche in 2016. The second

tranche we are clear will be next year in 2015 with a view to implementing that at the end of 2015. We envisage at the moment doing a third tranche in 2016.

Q126 Chair: Right, so you do see it as being cumulative. The evidence base that is used for saying what goes into the first tranche and what goes into the second tranche—how much does the precautionary principle fit into that? Some would say that you have been moving the goalposts to some extent and a different set of criteria has been used for what does go into tranche 1.

George Eustice: Shall I go first and then maybe Ian can come in because he is our evidence expert on these things? The first thing to bear in mind is that in October 2011 the Scientific Advisory Panel gave advice on the 127 identified by the regional stakeholder groups and raised doubts about the strength of the evidence for some of them. Following that, we commissioned quite a bit of detailed work carried out by the SNCBs to do much more detailed, exploratory work to see what features were there. I would not say we have moved the goalposts in any way; it is just that we had a clearer evidence base having done that more methodical approach. That is how we identified, first, the 31 that we consulted on and then we arrived at 27.

It is worth pointing out that the socioeconomic impact of designating some sites, particularly Stour and Orwell off the east coast, and the effect that would have on a very important port for the UK, outweighed, in our view, the features that were trying to be protected. You should bear in mind that it was set out very clearly in the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 that socioeconomic factors should be taken into account when designating MCZs.

Q127 Chair: I suppose what I am trying to get to the bottom of is the criteria that you are using, which appeared at the very start of this to be based on best available scientific evidence, but has moved to something that is robust. The real issue then is how you are balancing the economic with the social but also the environmental as well. I am interested as to what methodology you are using to perhaps say that some social and environmental considerations carry less weight than the economic ones.

Professor Boyd: I can pick that one up. It is a very difficult area of science to define the costs and benefits of these different advantages and disadvantages of MCZs. It is fairly clear, in terms of natural science, what we are able to see on the ground. In other words, we designate an MCZ for a particular species or a particular habitat. It is very difficult to put a financial value on that. However, it is relatively easy to put a financial value on the costs associated with, let us say, intervening to reduce fishing or some other economic activity within that MCZ area.

It is also very difficult to put a value on the benefits associated with the kind of management that might come into an MCZ. What we have to do is try to build a case on a case-by-case-basis, in other words for each MCZ, around the natural science evidence, the economic and social science evidence of cost, and the economic and social science evidence of benefit. There is a methodology applied to each of those and that methodology is continually evolving. The natural science is probably the most grounded one—in other words, it is most consistent—but the economic and social science evidence is the one where an awful lot more judgment has to be made.

Q128 Chair: Just finally from me, you would not say then that you had abandoned the precautionary principle in how you set about determining these criteria?

Professor Boyd: Not at all. The precautionary principle allows for balancing costs and benefits because it is about making sure that you are managing the risks to those habitats appropriately. What we have done through this whole process is try to prioritise. In other words, the first tranche is high priority areas. In the second tranche, a similar process will be put in place in terms of prioritisation.

Also, in terms of balancing the costs and benefits, those sites with special natural features that are particularly vulnerable will be given a very high value in terms of the process that has been put in place. They will be designated at an earlier stage than ones where that value is maybe more questionable and there is a more difficult trade-off to be had between cost and benefit.

Q129 Zac Goldsmith: I understand the point you are making. The language used when this process began was all about developing an ecologically coherent network. They were not looking at it site by site. It was to ensure that even the very valuable sites are linked, even perhaps through less valuable sites, to other valuable sites. The idea was to create an ecologically coherent network. I think the number used at the time was around 127 and there was something of a consensus that, to create that coherent network, you needed something in that region of 127. I recognise you are not able to put a number to it now, but that ambition to create a coherent network—this is a question, not a statement—is still very much at the heart of this process, isn't it?

George Eustice: Yes.

Professor Boyd: Absolutely. It does not add up unless you put them all together in a coherent network, as you say. There are about 22 or 23 different habitat types that have been identified as being important. If you want a number of those different habitat types, you get towards the 100, or 127 or whatever you want in that sort of area, quite quickly. You maybe want four or five examples of each of these habitat types, and there are subtypes within these habitat types as well.

You are absolutely right: we want a network there and that is what we are marching towards but, at the same time, we have to strike this careful balance between cost and benefit because, if we do not, we will not be applying the appropriate measures within the legislation and it will be challenged.

Chair: We will come to costs and benefits in a bit more detail, but for now I turn to Simon Wright.

Q130 Simon Wright: You have allocated funding for seabed and habitat mapping to help strengthen the evidence base for marine conservation zones. Could you tell us what the plan is for this work in terms of the objectives, targets and timescales?

George Eustice: Well, in the last four years we have spent around £10 million developing the evidence base, looking at the most promising of the initial 127 sites that came through. We plan to spend another £2 million in the forthcoming year and that is going to be largely about doing exactly the kind of assessments and surveying of the seabed that you need to be able to develop a strong enough evidence base. Initially, obviously, we will be looking at the 37 candidate sites that have been identified. In answer to your question, there is

another £2 million available for the next year and over the course of the next 12 months we will be doing further work to assess the strength of the evidence on those 37 candidate sites.

Professor Boyd: Yes, that money will be spent on a combination of different activities. We have something called multi-beam sonar, which allows us to map the seabed. Having done a map of the seabed, you also have to know what is there, so things like grab sampling will be done. One of the areas of priority identified for the next tranche is subtidal muds, for example. We would need to sample the subtidal muds to see what the quality of those muds was in terms of species composition and that sort of thing. There are a whole variety of different methodologies that will be used by some of the DEFRA scientists but also subcontractors as well.

Q131 Simon Wright: Have you been able to learn any lessons from the seabed mapping carried out by Ireland and Norway?

Professor Boyd: Ireland has mapped the whole of its EZ area and Norway is in a similar position. We do not have an equivalent map of our whole EZ area. Rough estimates are somewhere between £200 million and £400 million to map that whole area.

What I think we have learned as a lesson is that in the Irish case they think that there is an economic uplift from doing that kind of mapping exercise because it provides advantages to many different users of the sea area. I have to say that, as a scientist, I would love to see it done, but we have a very large economic zone marine area and, as a result, there is a very large cost to doing this. Technology is getting better all the time, but interestingly we can piece together a very large amount of our sea area by using data that has been collected mainly by fishing vessels, I have to say, because most of these fishing vessels are at sea all the time running their sonar. If you take those data and piece them together you can get a pretty good map and we already have a pretty good map of our marine area as a result.

Q132 Simon Wright: How will the mapping evidence being gathered be fed into the process for designating further MCZs?

Professor Boyd: One of the challenges is that we do not know our marine environment, our marine seabed, nearly as well as we know our terrestrial environment. We have relatively little knowledge about those areas that we have not yet looked at or not looked at in any detail at all. Future mapping will almost inevitably point out areas that we did not know about before that are of interest. In due course, that will allow us to modify our approach to creating MCZs. It is impossible for me to say now what that will be because until we have the data we do not know. I would confidently predict that we are going to find new habitats of important conservation interest that we will want to try to protect at some point in the future as a result of the new data we are bringing in.

Q133 Chair: Just before we leave the seabed mapping, the original question was about the timetable, the objectives and the targets. Is that there inside the Department and are you working to it? Are there set targets and timetables?

George Eustice: I think I could not have been clearer. We are doing the work now. We have identified the 37 candidate sites for the next tranche and we intend to issue a consultation on the second tranche next year.

Q134 Chair: Sorry, I meant on the actual allocation of funding to the seabed and habitat mapping, the funding that you have allocated for the work that is ongoing. Within that, do you have a series of, “This will be done by such and such a date and it will include this”, with targets to it?

Professor Boyd: There is no current plan to map the UK EZ. I can say that for sure now. What I think we can do is pull together a very creditable map of the UK seabed from these ad hoc sources of data and information—in fact, we already have it.

George Eustice: Just to be clear about the £2 million that I said we intend to spend this year on gathering evidence. Obviously, if we intend to go to consultation at the beginning of 2015, that sort of survey work is going to have to take place during the rest of this year. We will need to survey those 37 sites that we have identified as candidates.

Q135 Chair: I suppose what I am really getting at is the money that you have allocated for the work that is about to get under way. Within that allocation what is the end date or timetable and targets on that, just to get a picture?

George Eustice: By the end of 2014.

Professor Boyd: That is going to have to be by the end of this year simply because we are going to have to use those data in the next tranche in deciding how to move forward with the MCZs. I do not know the exact dates, but if I was at sea I would want to do it this summer rather than in the winter.

Chair: Okay, thank you.

Q136 Caroline Lucas: I want to go back to the issue of cost and benefit. Professor Boyd, I know you have already touched on some of the difficulties with this. It does seem that you have been able to identify the potential social and economic costs of MCZs, but have not been quite as successful at being able to capture the benefits. I wanted to ask how you will ensure that proper account is taken of the benefits as well as the costs in considering future MCZs.

George Eustice: Ian might come in after this because I know he has looked at some of the studies that have attempted to do this. I know we have had representations from a number of NGOs who have said we should try to give greater weight or greater allowance to, for instance, the benefits to diving or tourism or other economic benefits from designation. I have to say it has proved quite difficult to get the kind of reliable enough evidence base that you would need to do that. Ian, there was an attempt by one university to do this.

Professor Boyd: That is right, there was. I think there are two different kinds of benefits we can talk about. The first kind is the kind the Minister has alluded to, which is the direct economic benefits to people from the presence of an MCZ in that you might get added tourism or added diving activity, and the economic uplift that goes with that. There are ways of estimating that, but they are not very accurate.

The other kind of benefit is an environmental benefit. You get an environmental uplift. A good example would be oyster beds or other bivalve shellfish beds do a fantastic job of filtering the water and can filter out exotic zooplankton that might cause harmful algal blooms and things like that. Those are the sorts of things that we are working hard to try to quantify in an economic context. Of course, we have the Natural Capital Committee that is

looking at these sorts of methodologies at the moment. I think they have looked at fishing in particular as one of their case study examples.

From a scientific perspective, we are still at a relatively early stage of being able to properly cost those benefits in, but they almost certainly do exist. At the moment, you can do it in a qualitative kind of way and that has been taken into account in trying to judge the value of particular MCZs. It is very qualitative rather than quantitative. We do want to move to a quantitative mechanism, though.

Q137 Caroline Lucas: Could you say a little more about what else you in particular and from the perspective of MCZs are doing to make that happen? I understand in parallel there is the work going on in the Natural Capital Committee and that is great, but is there anything that is under your auspices precisely to feed into this process? While I completely understand what you are saying about the fact that some of these processes are underdeveloped and need more consideration, I am not sure what particular momentum you can give to that to be able to fulfil the demands that you have from this perspective.

Professor Boyd: Yes. We, of course, carried out the national ecosystem assessment, which reported two or three years ago. I cannot remember exactly when it was. We have had a project going on called the national ecosystem assessment follow-on, which is taking what was essentially an academic treatise on how you assess the value of different parts of the environment and trying to turn that, using tools, into something that people can use on the ground, planners can use. That is just coming to an end now. We already have planning tools available that we hope, within the context of the management of the MCZs, might be able to be used by those people who are making decisions about the cost benefit trade-offs of doing different things.

Q138 Caroline Lucas: Are those in the public domain yet?

Professor Boyd: I think some of them are. Some of them are certainly being used by local authorities at the moment; that is for sure. I cannot tell you for sure whether they are being used on a trial basis or not.

Q139 Caroline Nokes: There has already been quite a lot of stakeholder engagement and consultation over marine conservation zones. What do you think DEFRA has learnt from those processes?

George Eustice: I think it is fair to say that the original regional stakeholder groups did some very good work. Towards the end we ended up with divisions in some of them between different interest groups, which I always think is a shame. We overcame that in the end, but there was a period when I think there was quite a bit of tension between the NGOs on the one side and the fishing industry and the ports groups on the other.

By the time we got to designation last November of the 27 we intend to go through with—and I was at the launch of that apprehensively waiting to be criticised by both sides—what happened was there was an outbreak of consensus. They were happy with the approach that we took and happy with the 27 that we had started with. The lesson is probably that we should work earlier to get a more reliable evidence base so everybody knows where they stand and you do not end up with people who have opposing views but a lack of an evidence base to make those views. That is why the way we have chosen to do it this time is, while we are still engaging very closely with all the stakeholders around the country,

we are putting that investment into getting the evidence base on the 37 sites so there is greater clarity about what we are trying to protect.

Q140 Caroline Nokes: As further tranches come forward and are considered, presumably you will be honing the consultation process even further?

George Eustice: Yes. I am very clear. When we announced the 37 candidate sites back in February, I attended the launch and we had all of the various groups there, from fishing interests to ports to the NGOs as well. We had all of them there to discuss the 37 candidate sites, why we had chosen those and what the next steps would be in terms of gathering evidence.

Q141 Mike Kane: Minister, I am thinking about this policy that should have been broadly welcomed but then was condemned by 86 scientists. Isn't the classic rule or the first rule of politics not to promise what you cannot deliver? They all thought there were going to be 120 sites and in the end there were 27. Straight out of the gate the people who should have been validating this policy, which is a good policy, were condemning it.

George Eustice: To be honest, all those that we engage with recognise the value of doing it in stages. Coming back to what I said earlier, it is very easy to go and draw lines on maps that do not mean anything. If we want this to be that ecologically coherent network and to contribute and add to all the other marine protected areas we have, such as the SACs and the SPAs as well, it is important that when we put them in place they mean something. We must get the management measures right and must not overburden the IFCAs and have them maybe discrediting the whole project by rushing out management measures that have not been thought through and they have not had time to consult on properly. I think it is right to have done it in three tranches and if we want to get that coherent network, we have to build it incrementally.

Professor Boyd: Maybe I could follow up on the 86 or so scientists who wrote in on this because, in another life, I could have been one of them. I think there is a difference between the way scientists see the world and the way reality exists in the context of trying to implement this in a practical way. Both are right to a very great extent. What the scientists are saying, quite rightly, is that we need a coherent network and, if you take all the different kinds of habitats, you are talking about 100-odd type of sites. That is the kind of message they are giving, but what they are not engaged with is what the Minister has described in terms of the practical implementation process. What I would say is that we are trying to move down that road as fast as we possibly can, but it has to be done in a structured way.

George Eustice: In October 2011, the Science Advisory Panel raised concerns about the evidence base. The Stour and Orwell site was not taken forward due to the socioeconomic impacts that outweighed the benefits. Hilbre Island was on the 31, but when we looked closely at it the features that were said to be there were not as strong as some had thought. I would argue that we sifted down to the 27 by applying a very scientific and very evidence-based approach.

Q142 Mike Kane: Minister, you mentioned that what is going to be important is the management measures. When are they going to be brought forward? When do we intend to see them? To what extent do they rely on co-operation with our European Union partners?

George Eustice: At the beginning of this year, I had a quarterly meeting with all the IFCAs. We have made available £3 million—

Chair: Sorry, who?

George Eustice: The IFCAs, the inshore fisheries and conservation authorities.

Professor Boyd: I think it is time for a new term.

George Eustice: Okay, sorry. Internally on the inshore ones, nought to six nautical miles, the IFCAs will lead in terms of putting in place the by-laws and the management measures to protect those sites. I meet them quarterly. We met them and, in fact, we discussed this in January and I will be meeting them again shortly. I think they are coming in April. We have made available £3 million of new burdens money to help them with the work they have to put in place these management measures. Some of them have already started doing some work with stakeholders to work out what those management measures should be.

We would expect that to continue over the summer and to start to see some of those by-laws taking place. We have made available to the IFCAs and also to the MMO some work done by Natural England and the JNCC, which is a kind of matrix to help them prioritise, first, the sites and the features at most risk from, say, fishing activity so that those can be prioritised most, and also the bits that need to be done first.

We see this as an evolving process. They will not slap down all of the management measures in one go and we certainly would see some of these by-laws taking shape over the course of later this summer and this year, starting on the things that matter most, the priorities first.

Q143 Mike Kane: That work begins in the next quarter, but there are no firm outcomes yet of when they will be in place.

George Eustice: No. I think some of them have passed certain sort of enabling by-laws, which start to give them the powers to do certain work that they need to do around it. In terms of the management measures, I am not aware that any of them, as yet, have put in place the by-laws to implement the management measures. As I said, they are doing the work. We have made available £3 million to support them in doing that work and we would see that starting to take shape, starting with the priority features first, during the course of this year.

Q144 Mike Kane: It is just the second bit of my question about co-operation with other EU countries.

George Eustice: Co-operation with the EU, yes. Obviously, particularly the sites that are beyond 12 nautical miles, that does get into EU territory and a lot of that will be covered by certain elements of the Common Fisheries Policy as well. I do not know if you want to add anything to that. Basically, the rule is that nought to six miles is the IFCAs and most of the ones we have are inshore. There are some that are offshore. Six to 12 is the MMO and outside 12 is the MMO, but obviously, because you are starting to then get into European waters, the MMO would need to work closely with the European Commission and other member states in terms of designing the management measures for those.

Q145 Zac Goldsmith: There is a discussion of a new framework to try to co-ordinate all the different agencies responsible for the English MPA network. It would be

useful to get an update from you on where those discussions are at and when you are likely to come up with some kind of plan for that.

George Eustice: Sorry, just say that again, which group?

Zac Goldsmith: We have heard about a new framework that you have been discussing to try to improve co-ordination between all the different agencies that deal with the English MPAs. I am trying to remember who gave us that evidence and I cannot remember.

George Eustice: Do you mean the implementing groups? There was an implementing group that included quite a few of the NGOs and other fishing organisations as well, which was to try to, in particular, work out management measures on the SPAs.

Q146 Zac Goldsmith: My understanding is that you were not looking to set up a new organisation. You, being the Government, were looking to set up an MOA, a memorandum of understanding of some sort, to try to bring together better co-ordination of all the various agencies. I may be wrong on that.

George Eustice: If you want, I can double check specifically. We are always for improving co-ordination, so we are having stakeholder meetings already on the MCZs and there is an implementing group on the SPAs.

Zac Goldsmith: I do not remember who gave us that evidence, so I cannot—

Q147 Chair: Plans were said to be in the early stages of development with an aim to introduce new arrangements later in 2014.

George Eustice: Right. Specifically relating to MCZs?

Chair: Yes, that is my understanding. I may be wrong but that was my understanding.

George Eustice: Perhaps we can take that away or we may even get a note passed to us shortly and we can return to it.

Chair: Can I just check; is it in your submission? That might be helpful.

George Eustice: Right, you think it is in our submission.

Professor Boyd: It is in the submission, is it?

Chair: I thought it was. Perhaps I misunderstood it. It is trying to understand what this new framework is that is going to improve the co-ordination between all the agencies responsible.

Q148 Zac Goldsmith: It was the DEFRA submission, “Currently reviewing possible frameworks to facilitate improved processes for co-ordinating and reporting on actions required, and being implemented to achieve conservation objectives for MPAs.”

Chair: Thank you, Mr Goldsmith.

Zac Goldsmith: The plans are said to be in the early stages, exactly as you just said, Chair. Do you want to get back to us on that?

George Eustice: Perhaps we can return to that one later on and I will see if we can get a bit more information.

Q149 Zac Goldsmith: On a connected issue, there is little mention of marine planning in the Government's statements on MCZs. How do you intend to ensure that the MMO and other responsible bodies integrate their work on these related issues? Again, this has come up in a couple of evidence sessions that we have had.

George Eustice: The MMO have just concluded the consultations on the east inshore and east offshore and are in the process at the moment of finalising those marine plans. They have just started consulting on the south coast as well. I think these are absolutely crucial and the MCZs are obviously a very important feature in terms of developing those marine plans.

As we get more and more seabed uses putting a demand on the environment—you have offshore wind, you have the oil and gas industry, you have shipping, you have angling interests—it is becoming an ever more complex environment in terms of human use of the seabed. We do need to have some clarity and have something akin to a planning framework so that everybody knows where they stand. I would say that in the development of those plans the existence of an MCZ within a zone where a marine plan is put together would be a fundamentally important feature of it and would obviously be reflected in that plan.

Q150 Zac Goldsmith: Every part of the UK has different approaches in terms of understanding how and why an area should be designated as an MCZ. Is there a possibility that those different approaches in terms of the designations could have an impact in terms of the management? Is there any way in which the difference in approach by different parts of the UK could undermine the management of a coherent network?

Professor Boyd: When you say different parts of the UK, are you meaning the devolved Administrations?

Zac Goldsmith: Yes.

Professor Boyd: Yes. They do have slightly different approaches, although I think the philosophy of the approach is grounded in the same set of principles. From a purely administrative and governance perspective, we have the joint policy statement between Scotland and the rest of the UK particularly for the offshore region. What that does is essentially join the two together so we have total visibility across both activities. It should not result in a difference of approach between the two different sea areas. Both should be equally effective at doing the jobs, but they should be flexed to the different requirements in the different areas. If one was to look at any particular species, you would not find a difference between the level of protection, let us say, in Scotland compared with south of the border.

Q151 Zac Goldsmith: So it is not an issue. I was going to ask about co-ordination with the EU, but that has already come up. I just want to press that if I could for a second. An unsung part of the reforms that were achieved by your predecessor was to ensure that conservation laws affecting our own sovereign waters would have to apply to non-British vessels as well, which was not the case before these reforms were agreed, as I understand it. Had that not occurred, would it have been much harder to implement the kind of plans that you are talking about at the moment? You could designate an area as an MCZ with all the rules and regulations that accompany that, but those rules may not have applied to foreign vessels. Would that have been the case before these reforms came through or not?

George Eustice: The key change, as you will know, is the move to regional decision making. The RACs, the regional advisory committees, and the member states that have a shared interest in a fishery are going to agree the approach in each of those individual sections of the water. Naturally, it is easier to get agreement between two or three countries that have a shared interest in one water than it would be at an EU level with 28 member states squabbling. Yes, I think the changes do make it easier to make decisions and to have the countries that are most interested in getting those decisions right at the table.

Q152 Zac Goldsmith: Do you anticipate any significant opposition from any EU partners to the plans that you are currently trying to implement at the moment?

George Eustice: No, but, as I say, the MMO that are beyond 12 nautical miles will have to work with their equivalent authorities in other EU countries as well to get agreement. There is no point us abiding by rules if other countries do not.

Madam Chairman, before we go on, I have here the answer to the issue of paragraph 20.

Q153 Chair: Yes, governance arrangements. Don't worry—I hadn't forgotten.

George Eustice: I am afraid it is not all that exciting and it does just restate that there are some discussions going on around new arrangements for co-ordination between the various Government agencies, DEFRA, Natural England and the JNCC, and other regulators such as the MMO. There are no conclusions as yet, but we do expect to have proposals by the end of summer this year.

Q154 Chair: Yes, but that was exactly what your submission said. Sorry, Zac.

Zac Goldsmith: Yes. Can I push that?

George Eustice: Well, we were a little bit vague. It says, "New arrangements later in 2014", so we are now saying it will be the end of the summer. We have brought it forward by about five months.

Q155 Zac Goldsmith: Is it possible that, on the back of that, you might end up creating a new organisation, merging some of the functions of these, or is it an MOA?

George Eustice: I do not see there being any appetite to create yet another organisation. I think it would be much more a memorandum of understanding, making sure that there is no duplication and that the procedures are in place to make sure there is a single lead agency, for instance, leading on a particular area and there is no confusion about who should take the lead.

Professor Boyd: I wanted to make one more point on the European aspect. We obviously have the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive as well, which sets out that we have to have good environmental condition of our seas by 2020. There is some work going on there led by the MMO to make sure that we have the right monitoring and everything in place to deliver that.

Q156 Chair: Just going back to Zac Goldsmith's point about the governance arrangements and the submission from you saying that we would have something in place by the end of 2014, it is April already. We are a quarter of the way through 2014. I would have thought that you would have had some kind of understanding of how far advanced these arrangements are and would be chivvying them on to get some kind of an outcome.

George Eustice: My experience of these things is that sometimes it can take a lot of discussion to work out what you are going to do, but once you have worked it out you can get on and do it quite quickly. If we are able to have those proposals by the end of the summer, I have no doubt we will be able to put in place some kind of memorandum of understanding to make things work.

Q157 Chair: Will you be taking a personal interest in overseeing those?

George Eustice: I will be, yes, particularly since I had overlooked that particular paragraph on reading the submission earlier.

Chair: Good. Okay, thank you.

Q158 Martin Caton: The MMO's budget for the protection of the environment was £13 million in 2012-13. It is going to fall to £7.8 million by 2015-16, despite an expansion of the MCZ network that you have already mentioned. Are you sure you are going to be able to see that the full network of MCZs is properly managed and policed over the next few years with that sort of cut?

George Eustice: I am not sure I recognise that figure, so I would need to double check it. The MMO, like all Government Departments with the financial situation that we face as a country, has had to have cuts and they have had to make savings like everybody else. They have done that by doing a number of things: changing the way that the fisheries protection fleet works and renegotiating some of their procurement deals and the like.

All I would say, coming back, is a lot of these MCZs are inshore and are the responsibility of the IFCAs. We have made available £3 million of new burdens funding to help them. Some good progress has been made inshore with quite low-cost vessel monitoring systems for the inshore fleet that uses very basic mobile telephone technology so that they can monitor where boats are going. That kind of technology, the inshore vessel monitoring system, which we are keen to promote and that we have also made available some funding to help develop, will support the enforcement efforts of the IFCAs.

Q159 Martin Caton: But my question is about the MMO arguably dealing in more difficult waters, a substantial increase in the amount of work that they have to do and a substantial decrease in the resources available to do it. Do you have no concerns about that?

George Eustice: As I said, I would need to check the figures because I do not think the MMO's budget, although it has been reduced, has been cut by quite the amount you said—£13 million to £7 million.

Q160 Chair: That was in the MMO's submission, *Corporate Plan 2013-16*, and that plan did envisage a reduction from £13 million in 2012-13 to £7.8 million. Maybe my colleagues know a little bit more detail about that.

George Eustice: I can check that but, as I said, I know that their budget has been cut. Particularly on fisheries, I know they renegotiated their contract with the Royal Navy and got a very significant saving, despite not having any cut in the level of service. It may be that that large cut reflects the fact that they managed to negotiate a much better deal, but there was no decline or reduction in the level of service being offered by the Royal Navy by way of the fisheries protection fleet. It just meant that the MMO drove a harder bargain and managed to save some money.

Q161 Martin Caton: Are you at all concerned that the increased demand of the MCZ programme in years ahead might mean that other important parts of the MMO's work get neglected?

George Eustice: I do not think that, no, because a major part of what the MMO does is still going to be enforcing legislation around fisheries. That is going to continue to be an important part of it. As I said, a lot of these new MCZs that we have are inshore and it will be the IFCAs that lead on them. I do not think that having these additional sites beyond the 12 nautical miles is going to place sufficient burden on the MMO that it is going to compromise the other vital work they do.

Q162 Martin Caton: Are public spending restrictions influencing your decisions on the number of MCZ designations and how fast they are rolled out?

George Eustice: As I said at the beginning, our main focus here is to ensure that we develop this coherent network incrementally, that we get the management measures right one tranche at a time. There is a lot of sense to doing it in three stages. I made it clear that we have made available already £10 million in the last four years and there will be another £2 million next year to do the survey work that we need to assess those next 37 candidate sites. I do not accept what you say. We are putting money into developing this network.

Professor Boyd: If I can add to that, I think there is a certain rate at which you can do this from an evidence perspective. We are lacking general evidence in the marine area to be able to make justified decisions. Yes, you could throw money at it, but our real problem is the intellectual capability to interpret a lot of the information and data that we have. I responded to Caroline Lucas about that earlier on in that we are only just beginning now to develop the tools to be able to interpret these data in a way that allows us to make rational decisions about costs and benefits, for example. There is a real limit to the rate at which we can move forward and it is not simply a matter of the amount of money you can put towards it.

Q163 Caroline Lucas: I might be being oversensitive but the language that you are using sounds very careful in the sense that it is not simply a matter of finance. Also, the Minister did not exactly answer the question. If we were to put it to you, would you agree with the assertion that public spending restrictions have no impact at all on the number of designations and the speed with which they are rolled out? Would your answer be yes or no?

Professor Boyd: I am just a scientist. I do not think it would make any difference at all to the roll-out procedure. This is being done in a well-structured way. With some of these things, especially where there are a lot of stakeholders involved, there is only so fast you can move along, especially in some of the more difficult areas where there are conflicts of interest. It is a matter of getting the stakeholders all socialised with their own individual points of view and their own problems. That can take years and that is the process we are involved in at the moment.

Chair: Thank you. Dr Whitehead.

Caroline Lucas: Well—

Chair: Oh, sorry, Caroline.

George Eustice: Did you want me to have a go?

Caroline Lucas: I want a politician's answer as well as a scientist's answer.

George Eustice: The announcement to do this in tranches was made back in November 2011 and that followed hot on the heels of the report that came from the Science Advisory Panel. The real reason for doing this in tranches was that we needed the time to gather the evidence base and the right way to do it was incrementally in three tranches. We made that clear. The decision was taken after the Science Advisory Panel came back. Coming back, I think developing this incrementally gives it more credibility. I also think you spend money better if you do not splash it around in a very short timescale and try to get quick results.

Caroline Lucas: I will take that as a no. Okay, thank you.

Chair: Have you finished?

Caroline Lucas: Yes, I have.

Q164 Dr Whitehead: The problem with the MMO's position on funding is that, while in evidence to us they very gamely said they were working better and had smarter ways of implementing policies and, therefore, the funding reduction was not going to be quite as impactful as it might otherwise have been, the thrust of what it said was that, as a result of working with other agencies, a number of the issues relating to rollout and, for example, enforcement of policing of those new areas could effectively be offset to other agencies.

However, other agencies then said to us, particularly the National Oceanography Centre, that the MMO are going to be the ones in the front line and unless they have sustained resource it is going to be very difficult for them to do that job effectively. It appears that, in terms of the likely outcome of that funding drop and rollout and enforcement of rollout, various agencies are potentially rather going like that in terms of who is going to do what in terms of enforcement and then saying at the same time, "It will probably be all right on the night because we are going to work well together". Is that your view of how that is going to happen or do you think there are other factors at work?

George Eustice: As you mentioned in your question, when the chief executive came before the Committee he was very clear that he thought the MMO had sufficient resources to deliver MCZ management. I would not underestimate the value of some of these new technologies, such as the inshore vessel monitoring systems, that are being developed. They mean that, rather than having to manually monitor where all these boats are or trying to catch people fishing where they should not be, quite sophisticated management measures can be developed that might enable boats to fish around features and monitor that they are doing that because they will have the electronic monitoring equipment to do it.

I would not underestimate the value of this improved technology to monitoring the management measures around the sites. The MMO have given an assurance that they have sufficient resources to manage these sites. As I said earlier, a lot of these are in the inshore waters anyway and we have made available an additional £3 million to the IFCA's to help them put in place and develop management measures.

Q165 Zac Goldsmith: A slightly different question: the freshwater world in this country is very largely protected by the anglers, who are registered and a known body of

people. All the best river campaigns that I know of are launched by the anglers who use and love the rivers. There does not seem to be anything like the same approach in relation to the ocean anglers, the recreational fishermen, who are probably going to be okay in relation to some of these MCZs. They are probably going to be able to continue doing what they do in some of them. Has any thought been given to harnessing that extraordinary number of people who have the same interests as conservationists and so on in the maintenance and policing and monitoring of MCZs? Is that even on the radar?

George Eustice: The Angling Trust regularly makes known their views on this and we did publish the report on the value of sea angling last year. I think there is potential there. Obviously, most of the angling takes place offshore; not all of it, some go out by boat and do line catching as well. I suppose it is slightly more difficult in the open seas for them to be able to feed back reliable information, but certainly on some of the inshore sites it may be possible. I am sure they would be useful partners in that. I have had representations from some of them that they would like to have representation on the IFCAs and for it to be a fixed thing that there must be angling interests on there, but I think the best IFCAs do consult and work very closely with sea angling interests.

Professor Boyd: Just to extend that, in DEFRA generally we are developing procedures for what we call using citizen science; in other words, using people who are on the ground, who have knowledge of the ground—in this case, the sea—to provide us with feedback and information using mobile phone technologies and apps and these sorts of things. This is very much in our thinking and I can see absolutely no reason why sea anglers should not be part of that process in the future. Going back to some of the previous questions about how the MMO can deal with this, these are the kinds of technologies and procedures that they are thinking of.

Q166 Chair: I have one further question. We were talking earlier about how many overall sites there would be and this incremental route that you now say you are embarking on of 27 and then the next tranche and then the issue that Zac Goldsmith raised about whether or not there is going to be a network. One of the things that we have not really covered is the importance of mobile species and how that fits into this changed way of taking the whole concept forward.

Is there anything you would like to share about how you are taking account of the concerns of people like MARINELife about what weight is being given to mobile species and how the thinking is being included in decisions about designation and decisions about what the management input should be into looking at the whole network?

George Eustice: I might let Ian come in after. The one thing I would like to point out as well is that obviously we have the 27 marine conservation zones, but marine-protected areas go far wider than that. You have to start looking at this in the context of the fact that in the UK waters we also have 108 SACs and another 108 SPAs, with more that we are consulting on now. If you start to look at all those, together with the SSSIs that we have on the many inshore areas, which is now around 300, you start to get quite a large number—well over 500 sites, which together protect, one way or another, around 25% of our inshore waters.

My view is that generally the way that the MCZs work is they are best served protecting permanent features, seabed features and habitats. Sometimes, when it comes to those

mobile features, the way that the SACs and the SPAs work, the European marine sites lend themselves better to protecting some of those mobile species. Ian, I do not know whether you wanted to add anything.

Professor Boyd: Not an awful lot, except to say that we are protecting such a large part of our inshore waters that, from the point of view of mobile species, that is a huge advantage. I think at least one of the current sites is already protecting one of the mobile species, which is the smelt. For the most obvious mobile species, things like seabirds, the European protected areas, the SPAs, are the mechanism that we are using. They are likely to be extended in their geographical extent in due course as well.

From the point of view of protecting species, designating MCZs is not always for all species the best way to provide protection, but they all have protection under the law, under the Wildlife and Countryside Act for example, and in many cases under the Habitats Directive. As a result of that, the most effective interventions are things like bycatch reduction in fisheries and those sorts of things. It is continuous monitoring of marine activities to make sure they are not negatively affecting some of these mobile species.

Chair: Right, thank you. I take it that there are no further questions from my colleagues. Can I thank you both for coming this afternoon? When we do finally produce our report, we very much look forward to the Government's response to it. Thank you both very much.