



Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs

The Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP
Secretary of State Environment, Food & Rural Affairs

2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Sir Robert Goodwill MP
Chair, Environment,
Food and Rural Affairs
Committee
By email only

11th January 2023

Dear Sir Robert,

Sea life mortality off the northeast coast

Thank you for your letter dated the 13th December 2022.

I can confirm that the independent Crustacean Mortality Expert Panel has already been stood up by my Chief Scientific Advisor, who consulted the Government's Chief Scientific Advisor, to assess the evidence from all parties involved with a view to determine the most likely cause of the crustacean mortality event in the Northeast of England. Terms of reference were agreed at the first panel meeting held in December.

Membership is comprised from 11 different organisations, including many leading UK marine science universities. To ensure independence, institutes and individuals with past involvement in assessment of the crustacean mortality have not been included, nor is any member from a Defra agency. The identities of the panel members have not been made public yet to enable them to assess the scientific evidence without pressure or influence from interested parties. Names and affiliations of members will be released when the report of the panel is published.

Regarding ways of working, the panel will focus on the scientific evidence, including scientific data from key stakeholders, and rely on the diverse expertise of its members to consider all possible causes of crustacean deaths.

I expect to receive the report this month.

Yours sincerely,

Enclosed

Annex A: Aims of the Expert Committee

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Aims of the expert committee:

- To scientifically review all the available evidence of the unusual crustacean mortality event.
- To identify the most likely causes and implications for recurrence.
- The scientific review will include, but will not be limited to, consideration of the theories put forward as a cause of this mass-mortality:
 - the consequences of the breakdown of an algal bloom
 - the impact of chemicals (including pyridine toxicity)
 - the impact of maintenance dredging of shipping channels

The panel will focus on scientific issues and will not consider government processes during the investigation of the mortality event(s), food safety, nor the economic implications of the deaths.