



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

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

7 February 2023

Dear Sir Robert,

Report of the independent Crustacean Mortality Expert Panel

Thank you for your letter dated the 31st January 2023.

The independent crustacean mortality expert panel (CMEP) published its findings on the 20th January 2023. The report states that a novel pathogen is about as likely as not to have caused the crustacean mortality event that occurred from October 2021.

Given the extent of the analytical work already undertaken, and further advice, I have decided that it is highly unlikely that we will find the cause and so no further analysis will be undertaken by the government.

The Environment Agency is the first responder. As for future events, there are sampling and testing protocols – both routine and for emergencies - in place where activities and events require, such as incident investigation, marine licensing etc. I have asked that Cefas be engaged promptly if a similar event occurs.

With respect to the economic impact, the landings data assessment as detailed in the NEIFCA stock monitoring report (September 2022) indicated, at a regional scale, landings in late 2021 were broadly in line with historic data and a significant reduction in landings in October and November 2021 were not observed. This does not preclude the possibility that some highly localised fishing grounds suffered significant mortalities. The stock monitoring report also found, as the 2022 season progressed, lobster landings at a regional level were in line with seasonal expectations.

There is no question of the government providing any compensation or specific support, however the UK Government currently provides a range of support to the English seafood sector through the Fisheries and Seafood Scheme (FaSS) and the £100 million UK

Seafood Fund. Since opening in April 2021, FaSS has provided £2.2 million to seafood businesses in the North East and is open for applications now.

Yours sincerely,

Therese Coffey