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From the Secretary of State

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Dear Mr Ilnyckyj,

Thank you for your interesting email and attachment of 11 October about fisheries access agreements between the European Union (EU) and some West African coastal states.

Let me begin by stressing DFID's recognition of the vital importance of fisheries to several economies in Africa: fisheries not only provide much-needed revenue, but also contribute to the food security of some 200 million Africans, while providing direct employment to 2.6 million. The significance of fisheries, therefore, makes it essential to take full advantage of this valuable natural resource in effective and sustainable ways, ensuring it can make a key contribution towards meeting poverty reduction and growth in these vulnerable states. DFID is committed to this objective.

Our interest in fisheries access agreements has centred on fostering a better understanding of the effectiveness of these arrangements in generating long-term benefits to coastal developing states. This was stimulated largely in response to the association of access agreements with negative impacts of the sort you describe. The issues however, are far from straightforward. It can be argued, for example, that some countries have benefited substantially from EU payments for access to their waters; furthermore, it is of course their sovereign right to sell access to surplus stocks to whomsoever they choose. We also consider that EU agreements are in fact *relatively* benign when compared to agreements reached with other fishing blocks, due to their relative transparency and openness to public scrutiny.

More recently our attention (together with several other EU member states, non-governmental organisations and international organisations) has been to engage the European Commission (EC) on a range of pressing international fisheries policy issues such as access agreements, illegal fishing, policy coherence and trade liberalisation. In the specific context of access agreements, the policy dialogue has focused on challenging the assumption that the principles of equitable and sustainable resource use are upheld within access arrangements. This challenge has already led to some useful changes in EC policy. For example, an important outcome has been a move away from the earlier fisheries access arrangements into so-called *Fisheries Partnership Agreements* (FPAs). FPAs are intended to promote sustainable fisheries in third countries while simultaneously meeting the needs of the

external Common Fisheries Policy. The EC has also become increasingly aware of its obligation to pay special attention to the development objectives of the countries with which the Community has fisheries agreements. Despite these apparently positive moves, some concerns remain about how FPAs will be implemented in practice and whether indeed the development outcomes will reflect the spirit and principles of this new approach.

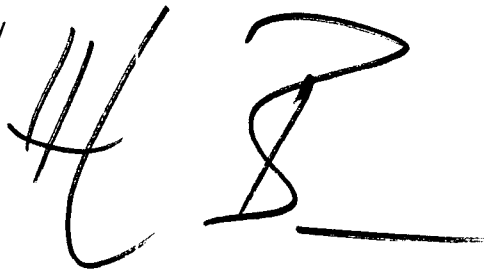
These concerns have led us, together with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, to commission a major study of the impact of FPAs on developing countries. The study has strong support from a number of other EU member states and from the EC. The study will identify policy measures needed to ensure that EC Council Conclusions of 2004 -relevant to FPAs- are met in full. A particular focus of the study will be on the effectiveness of FPAs in creating improved capacity of host countries to manage their own natural resources efficiently and effectively for their own long-term benefit. Part of the study will examine the impact of agreements on international trade, and their coherence with European development objectives and WTO principles. The study findings will be available to the public during the first quarter of next year.

In your paper you correctly note the centrality of good governance and fisheries management in ensuring benefits accrue sustainably. As you are aware, this argument applies equally to developing and developed nations. DFID recognises that if we are to avoid repeating past failures closer to home, international development assistance must first and foremost tackle weaknesses in fisheries management in developing countries. By doing so, developing countries will be better able to benefit from the inherent wealth of fisheries resources. I hope that our study will shed further light on the role that FPAs could play in ensuring this takes place.

I hope this is helpful.

Best wishes

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke at the end, positioned to the right of the text 'Yours sincerely'.

HILARY BENN