

Annex A

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 November 2011

From Richard Benyon MP

Minister for Natural Environment and Fisheries

Dear Stephen

COCKLING ON THE RIBBLE ESTUARY

Firstly, thank you for all your hard work over recent weeks leading up to the closure of the cockle fishery on the Ribble Estuary and for taking the time to dial in to the meeting with Fylde council and Lancashire police last week.

The last weeks cannot have been easy and I am grateful for you keeping not only me, but officials and all involved up to speed on the various issues faced on the Ribble in recent weeks, and I would encourage you to continue with this. It is a credit to you, the IFCA and the wider authorities involved that swift action has been taken to close the fishery, protecting public safety in face of a small minority of those acting recklessly in the face of the advice and efforts of your officers and those other local agencies involved on the ground. It has been particularly pleasing to see the appropriate local authorities, and in particular the IFCA taking the lead in managing what is very much a local issue, and a complex one at that. It is clear to me that the knowledge, evidence and expertise to manage a fishery such as that on the Ribble sits at this local level, with the IFCA.

I fully support your decision to close the fishery on a temporary basis in the interests of public safety, and share your concerns that this has prevented a number of legitimate cockle fisherman who have long-established rights to fish in the area and do so with all the health and safety measures in place taking part in this lucrative fishery. We must remember that it is a small minority of people fishing recklessly and in an unsafe manner that has forced your hand in this instance. Whilst I support the IFCA in its urgent consideration of what management measures could be introduced to allow for the fishery to re-open to these legitimate fishers as soon as possible, I agree with you that this must

only happen when you are satisfied that the safety of legitimate fishermen involved is not compromised.

Once again thank you and your colleagues for your hard work on managing the cockle fishery on the Ribble. It remains my firm belief that the IFCA is best placed to manage the fishery safely and successfully. That said I do not want you to feel isolated, the policy and press teams here stand ready to assist as necessary.

Yours sincerely
Richard Benyon

RICHARD BENYON MP

