# WRITTEN STATEMENT

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# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE**  | **Brexit and Our Seas** |
| **DATE**  | **01 May 2019**  |
| **BY** | **Lesley Griffiths AM, Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs**  |

Today I have published a consultation about Brexit and Our Seas. This signals the start of a conversation I want to have about the future of our seas as the UK prepares to exit the European Union. I want to hear your views, ideas and aspirations for our seas to help shape our future fisheries policy.

<https://gov.wales/marine-and-fisheries-policies-wales-after-brexit>

People are passionate about our marine environment, with over 60% of us living close to our shores and many more of us feeling a particular affinity to it. Our coasts and seas are an incredible natural asset, contributing to our well-being, as well as millions of pounds to the economy of Wales, supporting thousands of jobs and providing a rich heritage and culture.

Our exit from the European Union will bring challenges and opportunities and we must be alive to them. The opportunity to set our own policy is a significant moment for the marine environment and fishing industry in Wales. Now is the time to take stock, consider what we are doing well and where there is need for improvement and innovation. I want to use this stocktake to inform the development of a future fisheries policy which is fit for purpose whilst meeting the needs of current and future generations in a post Brexit Wales.

In my many conversations about Brexit, I know so many people are concerned about the impact it will have on our marine environment. Welsh Government is committed:

* To the principles and ways of working of Well-being and Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (WFG) and this is enshrined in the first Welsh National Marine Plan.
* To continue to implement the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 and the Nature Directives to improve biodiversity and work toward ecosystem resilience.
* To continue to ensure environmental standards are upheld in Welsh waters and the broad framework, as currently set out in the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), continues for the time being.
* To invest in new systems, new staff and new vessels to enforce standards and seek to prosecute those who do not comply.

These commitments together with the EU legislation which will be saved by the Withdrawal Act on exit from the EU will ensure stability and continuity in how we look after our marine environment.

However, leaving the EU will have a significant impact on the fishing industry.

The majority of the Welsh industry lands shellfish and over 90% is destined for the European market or to other markets through European trade agreements. An exit from the EU which leads to anything other than unfettered access to the European market or leads to non-tariff barriers, will be a significant challenge for the Welsh industry. Whilst we have been doing all we can to be prepared for a possible no deal exit, the extension of Article 50 is welcomed – the negative impact of a ‘no deal’ exit on the fishing industry must be avoided.

European fisheries are managed by the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). Leaving the EU, and therefore the CFP provides the opportunity to tailor our policies to meet Welsh needs. The Welsh fishing industry is distinct from those in other parts of the UK. Whilst many of the challenges will be the same, others will not. Devolution and our exit from the EU gives us the opportunity to develop and shape a system which works for Wales.

This consultation is the first stage in the process of creating a new policy and fit for purpose management regime, underpinned by an appropriate legislative basis, to ensure the Welsh marine environment and fishing fleets can prosper in a post EU world. It has been informed by extensive discussions with stakeholders over the past two years and I expect this dialogue to only increase now, as the nature of Brexit becomes clearer and our policies are developed.

I am pleased to be able to seek your views on what are very important issues for the people of Wales and, in particular, for our coastal communities as we leave the European Union.

I look forward to your responses.