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George Eustice
From George Eustice MP
Minister of State

Dear Stephen

Thank you for your letter of 16 October about marine aggregate extraction.

The Government already encourages planning authorities to give priority, so far as practicable, to the use of substitute or secondary and recycled materials and minerals waste before considering extraction of primary materials. This has resulted in secondary and recycled aggregates accounting for over 28% of the UK aggregates market, three times higher than the European average.

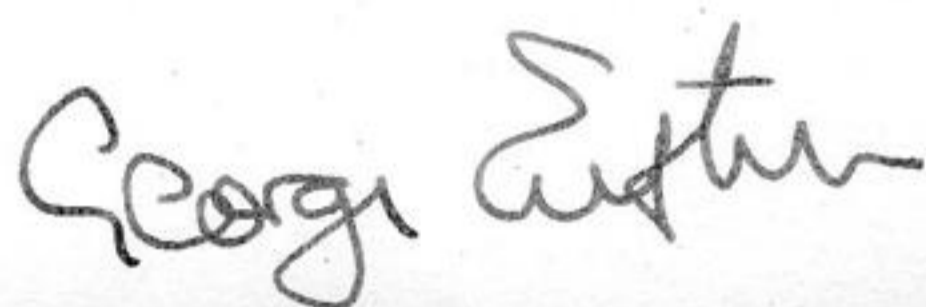
In comparison, marine-won sand and gravel provides a relatively small proportion (6%) of the UK aggregates supply. However, in certain regions where terrestrial resources are highly constrained, the marine supply continues to be especially important, for example in the south-east of England.

The UK is by no means the only developed country that extracts sand and gravel from the sea. Other European countries include Belgium, Netherlands, France, Germany and Denmark. We understand that Japan has banned sand extraction from rivers and inland seas, but not from the marine environment.

Aggregates extraction does have the potential to damage the marine environment, for example, from the loss of seabed habitat or impacts on fisheries. However, these potential impacts can be avoided or mitigated. Most licence applications are subjected to an environment impact assessment, including consideration of any potential impacts on coastal processes. A marine licence, or other regulatory approval to dredge, should only be issued if the decision maker is content that the proposed dredging is environmentally acceptable. Furthermore, extraction sites are left in a condition that enables recolonisation by the same benthic community, so that ecosystem services are not permanently lost.

The importance of marine aggregates, but also the need for appropriate mitigation measures and protection of the marine environment, is recognised in the UK Marine Policy Statement.

Government, regulators, The Crown Estate and the British Marine Aggregate Producers Association (BMAPA) have collaborated on an extensive programme of research (over £25 million in ten years) into understanding and minimising the environmental impacts of aggregates dredging. Following the completion of that programme BMAPA and The Crown Estate recently commissioned and published Aggregate Dredging and the Marine Environment – an overview of recent research and current industry practice. The report is available on The Crown Estate website at www.thecrownestate.co.uk.



GEORGE EUSTICE MP