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James Gray MP  
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*2nd* March 2010

From Huw Irranca-Davies  
Minister for Marine and Natural Environment

*Dear James,*

Thank you for your letter of 10 February enclosing a copy of a letter from your constituent Stephen Eades of Allington House, Allington, Chippenham, Wiltshire on behalf of MARINET about marine aggregate dredging.

Regional Environmental Assessment (REA) is a voluntary process initiated, led and funded by the marine aggregate industry to provide a greater understanding of cumulative environmental impacts of marine aggregate extraction on a regional scale. Government is supportive of such studies but there are no formal requirements for them to be undertaken. Whilst there is a recognition that the REA process will achieve best results from being open and consultative, it is ultimately down to industry to determine how these will be taken forward.

In recognition of its support for the REA process, Defra, in partnership with the Crown Estate and British Marine Aggregate Producers Association funded Cefas, Natural England, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) and English Heritage to jointly produce some non-binding guidance to industry on the aims and objectives of the REA process. I attach this guidance but it is also available from the Cefas website:

<http://www.cefas.co.uk/products-and-services/environment/marine-minerals.aspx>

It has been advertised widely at aggregate related meetings, including the South and East Coast Fisheries Dredging Liaison meetings of which I believe MARINET receive the minutes. In producing this guidance a series of stakeholder workshops were held, MARINET were invited to attend these but did not do so. A report of how opinions gathered from these workshops were incorporated into the final guidance document is also attached.

All individual applications to extract marine aggregate from areas covered by the REA, require assessment under the 2007 Marine Aggregate regulations administered by the Marine and Fisheries Agency (MFA). It is likely that the majority (if not all) applications made under these regulations will be subject to a full Environmental Impact Assessment process involving full public consultation and scientific scrutiny by the regulator (MFA), its technical advisors (Cefas) and statutory consultees including Natural England, JNCC, English Heritage and the Marine and Coastguard Agency.

Further information on the regulatory process can be found on the MFA website and is covered by accompanying guidance in MMG1 and MMG2. In addition, my letter of 11 December to you described the evidence base relating to sediment transport and our approach to licensing, monitoring and enforcement of aggregates dredging. Together these are designed to ensure that there are no adverse effects on coastal erosion from dredging.

*My regards,  
Huw*

**HUW IRRANCA-DAVIES**