

19th June 2009

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Dear Sir/Madam

CONSULTATION ON DRAFT SOUTH EAST RIVER BASIN MANAGEMENT PLAN

I am responding to the above consultation on behalf of the British Marine Aggregates Producers Association (BMAPA), the representative trade body for the British marine aggregate sector. The association, which is part of the wider Mineral Products Association, represents 11 member companies who collectively produce around 90% of the 21 million tonnes of marine sand and gravel dredged from licensed areas in the waters around England and Wales each year.

Marine dredged sand and gravel is principally used by the construction industry, and the marine contribution provides 20% of overall sand and gravel demand in England, 90% of fine natural aggregate (sand) demand in South Wales, 35% of primary construction aggregate demand in South East England and over 50% of primary construction aggregate demand in London. In this respect, marine aggregate supplies play a key role in supporting the delivery of various Government policies, including Sustainable Communities, the regeneration of Thames Gateway and the 2012 Olympic Games.

Marine aggregates also provide a strategic role in supplying large scale coast defence and beach replenishment projects – over 25 million tonnes being used for this purpose since the mid 1990's. With the growing threats posed by sea level rise and increased storminess, the use of marine sand and gravel for coast protection purposes will become increasingly important.

Our detailed response to the specific questions posed in the consultation is provided in the accompanying Annex appended to this letter.

We only have a few comments to make on the draft South East River Basin Management Plan (RBMP). We are concerned with the inclusion of a general measure to address hydromorphological and diffuse pollution pressures in licensing new developments. We consider it extremely unlikely that the scale of activity typically associated with individual marine aggregate licensed areas could pose a risk of causing a deterioration in status class of one or more water bodies. We recommend that the Environment Agency develop a clear methodology of evaluating any risks to streamline decision-making during the consenting process and avoid initial decisions being based on the solely the judgement of local officers.

BMAPA is part of the Mineral Products Association, the trade association for the aggregates, asphalt, cement, concrete, lime, mortar and silica sand industries

Registered in England as Mineral Products Association Limited No. 1634996
Registered at the above address

The marine aggregate sector is currently undertaking a Regional Environmental Assessment (REA) to consider the cumulative and incombination issues associated with a programme of licence renewals in this region. While a voluntary industry-led initiative, the REA approach has support from other statutory advisors (including Natural England, English Heritage and Cefas), and it may therefore provide a mechanism to ensure that RBMP and wider WFD issues are fully considered and where necessary appropriately addressed in a consistent and robust way.

Existing levels of extraction activity within WFD water bodies are not considered to have a significant impact on the achievement of WFD objectives and, therefore, unless activity within a water body increases substantially, this position should not change in the future. We think that it would be helpful for the RBMP to make this point clear to avoid unnecessary future discussion about the requirements for measures when circumstances haven't significantly changed.

There is also a seeming lack of clarity regarding the potential risk from marine aggregate dredging as a result of climate change, and the suggestion that this may compromise WFD objectives. We would note that the scale of marine aggregate extraction activity within the South East RBD is small relative to the size of the water bodies as a whole and considered unlikely to pose a significant risk to WFD objectives.

On a more general and final note, we would strongly encourage that national guidance be followed in a reasonable and pragmatic manner.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Russell', followed by a period.

Mark Russell
Director, Marine Aggregates

ANNEX: South East River Basin Management Plan

This plan sets out objectives for the water environment for the next six years and beyond. To what extent do you agree with what we are planning to achieve?

Q1 Do you agree with the assessment of problems in water bodies? What would you change?

No comment

Q2 Do you agree with the proposed objectives? What would you change?

No comment

Q3 For some water bodies we have proposed objectives with deadlines after 2015 or a lower overall target. Do you agree with these changes? What would you change?

No comment

This plan sets out the actions required to meet the objectives. To what extent do you agree that the right actions have been identified (actions that are proportionate and feasible)?

Q4 We have followed a process to assess (appraise) these actions. This process is described in detail in annex E. Do you agree with how we have done this?

No comment

Q5 What comments do you have on these actions? Are there any actions we've missed, or any changes you'd propose?

We are concerned with the inclusion of a general measure to address hydromorphological and diffuse pollution pressures in licensing new developments. We consider it extremely unlikely that the scale of activity typically associated with individual marine aggregate licensed areas could pose a risk of causing a deterioration in status class of one or more water bodies. We recommend that the Environment Agency develop a clear methodology of evaluating any risks to streamline decision-making during the consenting process and avoid initial decisions being based on the solely the judgement of local officers.

There are some extra actions that could be put in place if there were more certainty they would be effective. These are listed under scenario C, and we would like to know if you can help to make these actions happen.

Q6 What comments on Scenario C actions do you have, including any additional information you can supply about specific actions?

No comment

Q7 What support can you offer, such as undertaking any actions or providing resources to help deliver more for your environment?

No comment

Any other comments you may have on this plan

Q8 Do you agree with our assessment of how climate change will affect the pressures on the water environment?

This annex of the RBMP states that 'there is a possible increased risk from dredging as more material is required for flood defences to protect against increased flood risk as a result of climate change' with a suggestion that this may mean that WFD objectives may be compromised. It is presumed that this statement relates to the need for additional marine aggregate supply rather than navigation dredging. We would note that even though marine aggregate extraction occurs within the South East RBD, the scale of activity is small relative to the size of the component water bodies as a whole. The area of extraction would, therefore, have to increase considerably to pose a significant risk to WFD objectives.

Q9 Do you have any other comments on this draft plan that you haven't already told us?

Annex G of the dRBMP includes standard statements on the mechanisms that the Environment Agency considers may need to be used to consider the extent to which additional measures might be required in marine aggregate licences to support achievement of WFD objectives. Existing levels of extraction activity within WFD water bodies are not considered to have a significant impact on the achievement of WFD objectives and, therefore, unless activity within a water body increases substantially, this position should not change in the future. We think that it would be helpful for the RBMP to make this point clear to avoid unnecessary future discussion about the requirements for measures where circumstances haven't changed.