Written evidence submitted by the Devon and Severn Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (D&SIFCA)

Issue

Devon and Severn Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (D&SIFCA) written evidence to the Committee’s Sustainable Seas inquiry about the continued funding pressures faced by D&SIFCA, due to funds retained and withheld by the five northern [Severn] local authorities.

The total amount of funds retained and withheld from D&SIFCA by five northern [Severn] local authorities during the period 2011-2019 amounts to £515,731, including £59,850 in the current financial year 2018/19.

Background

Paragraph 24 of the Committee’s MPAs Revisited inquiry report (April 2017) highlighted the funding pressures faced by several IFCAs, including Devon & Severn IFCA:

"Two-thirds of IFCA funding comes from local government and one-third comes from Defra.61 The Marine and Coastal Access Act requires local Authorities to cover the costs of the IFCA’s.62 Local authorities were given additional funding to cover the extra costs associated with the creation of the IFCA’s. The total cost to the funding authorities was just over £8.7m in the 2014/15 financial year.63 This funding is distributed unequally across the 10 IFCA’s according to a funding formula. There is no obligation on local authorities to allocate all or any of the New Burdens Funding to the IFCA’s. Although most local authorities have allocated the full sum, some have not. Dr Bolt explained that:

There are three IFCA’s that have not received the full amount of the New Burdens Funding, which is not ring-fenced. Two of them are relatively minor amounts, almost certainly withheld for administration purposes. The bone of contention is in Devon and Severn.64

The five northern local authorities in the Devon & Severn IFCA have withheld a total of £455,200, including the proposed budgets for 2017. This equates to an average of 9.3% of the IFCA’s total budget being withheld annually.65 We heard that this:

Represents a significant challenge to the IFCA. For instance, £65k would fund two additional FTEs [full time equivalent staff], which would significantly increase the capability of the IFCA to both implement and enforce the coherent network of MPAs within their region.66"

D&SIFCA’s financial predicament remains extremely challenging and the Acting Chief Officer of wrote to Defra on 23 November 2018 to ask that the following text should be included in the IFCA Quadrennial Report:
"Since it vested in 2011, the Devon and Severn Inshore Fisheries and
Conservation Authority (D&SIFCA) has been under severe budgetary
pressure. The withholding of some of the ‘New Burdens’ funding from the
IFCA by several of the constituent local authorities has further exacerbated
this severe budgetary pressure. The original new burdens formula funding
settlement from Defra, post-2008/09 recession budget cuts for local
authorities, and the requirement by Government, following the Change of
Approach to fisheries management in European Marine Sites (EMS), for
increased protection of the MPA network have all exacerbated the funding
issue. Consequently, the future funding of the DSIFCA is a key concern,
potentially calling into question the Authority’s ability to discharge its statutory
duties in coming years. The supplementary evidence provided by AIFCA to
the Environment Audit Committee’s MPAs Revisited (April 2017) report
highlighted the current funding issues. New burdens money represented
55.8% of DSIFCA’s budget for 2018/2019. From the responses summarised
in the quadrennial report and from the consistent comments made at the
Authority’s meetings there remains strong resistance, on occasions
amounting to an outright refusal, from the Severn Local Authorities to fully
engage with and financially support the DSIFCA. The amount of funds which
the Severn Local Authorities have held back from the DSIFCA during the
period 2011-2018 amounts to £455,200. In this climate, it is highly unlikely
that the Severn Local Authorities would agree to continue to fund the DSIFCA
to current levels without the ongoing support from central government. It is
also highly unlikely that the DSIFCA would be able to fulfil its statutory duties
if available funding to the Authority was further reduced."

D&SIFCA has received an acknowledgement from Defra to effect that the
above text has been included in the IFCA Quadrennial Report and once the
report is laid in Parliament it will be published on Gov.uk.

The table below shows full details of the funds retained and withheld from
D&SIFCA by five northern [Severn] local authorities each during the period 2011-2019.

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Annex 1 (from the D&SIFCA Annual Plan 2018/19) shows the boundary of the
IFCA District, the funding local authorities, and key metrics/workload
The total amount of funds retained and withheld from D&SIFCA during the period 2011-2019 amounts to £515,731, which represents 16.5% of the New Burdens Funding due to be paid to D&SIFCA over the same period.

A total of £59,850 has been retained and withheld during the current financial year 2018/19, which represents more than 8% of D&SIFCA’s annual budget for 2018/19.

December 2018