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October 2021

To Rt Hon. George Eustice MP

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs,

Dear Secretary of State,

We welcome your announcement in May this year that the UK would adopt a “new world-leading target on species populations for 2030 aimed at halting species decline.” This followed the Government’s 25-year Environment Plan which set out plans to “protect the seas around us and marine wildlife”.

We have also enjoyed watching the video on DEFRA’s website narrated by Sting who says: “Now is the time for action, to come together and to scale up effective protection [of the marine environment] for the future of us all.”

We were, therefore, disappointed to learn that EDF was trying to renege on its commitment to install Acoustic Fish Deterrents (AFDs) on the two massive cooling water intake heads 3 kilometres offshore from the Hinkley Point C nuclear construction site and seeking a variation on planning conditions imposed by the Environment Agency (EA). The EA says it is unable to conclude removal of the AFD would have no adverse effect, and would be unlikely to meet the requirements of Habitats Regulations.

Marine and conservation groups based around the Bristol Channel argue that up to half a million fish would be sucked into Hinkley Point C every day if the new “giant plughole” was installed without an AFD and at least half of those would be killed outright, threatening to wipe out 11 billion fish and decimate stocks in Severn Estuary for 60 years. The Severn Estuary is one of the largest and most important mosaics of wetland habitat in Europe, according to the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT). The estuary and its tributary rivers support a wealth of wildlife. Its coastal habitats provide a home for tens of thousands of migratory waterbirds, around 100 species of fish.

EDF claims that only an estimated 650,000 fish would die every year as a result of going ahead with its cooling water intakes without installing AFDs and that the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS) is happy for them to go ahead without AFDs. In contrast, WWT points out that CEFAS’s relationship as a paid contractor to EDF and an agent of Government raises

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unavoidable questions of conflict of interest. The Environment Agency does not agree that the assessment by CEFAS is suitably precautionary or robustly evidenced.

Natasha Bradshaw – the Marine Management Organisation appointee to the Devon and Severn Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (DSIFCA); Trustee and Director of Severn Rivers Trust (SRT); Researcher at the University of the West of England (UWE, Bristol), says CEFAS is not considering the Severn in the way it ought to. CEFAS set fishing quota and are primarily concerned with commercial stock management. This is not the issue for the Severn Estuary and completely misses the point that the Severn is a fish nursery area, and one that is not thoroughly enough understood, but is designated to the highest legal level possible for its fish assemblage. Fish kill could have much wider impacts up and down the food chain and across the ecosystem of the River Severn and River Wye and other catchments as well as the Bristol Channel and further afield.

We understand that you will be deciding on EDF's Appeal, following a public inquiry which closed on 24th June. We urge you to set an example in the run up to COP26 and refuse EDF's Appeal so that the UK is seen to be a global leader in tackling the global biodiversity crisis.

Yours sincerely,

Sue Aubrey  
Chairperson,

