Andy Dixon
Marine Consents and Environment Unit
Marine and Waterways Division
Second Floor
Area D
3 - 8 Whitehall Place
London
SW1A 2HH

4 September 2006

Dear Andy,

Port of Tyne Authority Disposal Licence 31995/04/1 - Disposal of Contaminated Dredgings from River Tyne to the Sea

The Marine Conservation Society (MCS) would like to request some information from Defra in relation to the above disposal licence, granted to the Port of Tyne Authority on 6th October 2004 for a capping trial involving the disposal of 66,000 cubic metres of contaminated dredge material (CDM) at the Souter Point sea dumping ground.

It is MCS' understanding that Defra intended to treat this capping procedure as a pilot to develop UK wide best practice for the sea disposal of CDM. Post placement monitoring of the capping material and CDM was also to be undertaken by the Port Authority and CEFAS as a condition of the licence permit.

MCS would be grateful if you could advise us as to the current situation with regard to the monitoring. We understand that Tier 2 monitoring carried out by the Port Authority may have brought the integrity of the capping layer into question. This is of concern to MCS. You may remember that we wrote to Defra in January 2005, expressing unease about the suitability of the licensed method for CDM placement and capping in the shallow and highly energetic North Sea, and the risk of post placement erosion to the capping material.

Could you please advise us as to whether the capping layer has deteriorated, and if so what action has been taken to remediate the problem?

We would also be grateful for details of Defra's review of the operation. MCS represents the NGO umbrella group Wildlife & Countryside Link on Defra's steering group for managing contaminated marine sediments in the UK. We feel that conclusions from this trial would be of benefit to the steering group's deliberations.

In January 2005, we also expressed written concerns to Defra that the Port of Tyne's liabilities as the operator were not sufficiently specified in the licence, and whether the approved disposal procedure represented the best possible environmental option. These questions still remain and, we hope, may be answered during the course of a review. Any information that you can give us regarding progress with such a review would therefore be much appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Thomas Bell
Coastal Pollution Officer
Marine Conservation Society
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