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Our ref: 248065/RJ

13 June 2006

From the Minister for Local Environment, Marine and Animal Welfare
Ben Bradshaw MP

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ben Bradshaw".

Thank you for your letter of 4 April about the new European Union (EU) and Morocco Fisheries Partnership Agreement. I am sorry for the long delay in replying.

The Agreement was initialled by the two parties in December 2005 and was adopted by the Agriculture and Fisheries Council on 22 May. I note that you consider that adopting this Agreement would violate international law and exploit the Saharawi people.

The United Nations (UN) defines Western Sahara as a non-self governing territory. Morocco is the de facto administering power. As such, it is obliged under international law to ensure that economic activities under its administration do not adversely affect the interests of the people of the territory. The Fishing Agreement, under Article 10, envisages the establishment of a Joint Committee to monitor the implementation of the terms of the Agreement, including the impact it has on the local population.

The Government considered its position on this Agreement carefully, and our conclusion is that there is nothing in the Agreement which makes it inconsistent with international law in relation to Western Sahara and that the Agreement does not constitute recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara. I can assure you that the UK Government would not have supported the agreement if we had felt it would prejudice the status of the Western Sahara. The UK Government's position remains that the status of the Western Sahara should be dealt with under the UN process which we fully support to assist the parties to achieve a political solution to the question of the Western Sahara.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



Finally, you should be aware that Defra issued a Press Release on the adoption of the Agreement (Ref: 229/06, dated 22 May 2006) which can be accessed on the Defra website (www.defra.gov.uk).

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'B. Bradshaw', written in a cursive style.

BEN BRADSHAW