



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Mr Alasdair Morrison
Secretary
Struan Community Council
3 Coillore
Struan
Isle of Skye

12 November 2018
Our Ref: IB12157

Dear Alasdair

Thank you for contacting me regarding kelp dredging off the west coast of Scotland. Allow me to apologise for the delay in replying to you, due to the level of correspondence that I receive.

Let me say from the outset that I share similar concerns to you. Since becoming aware of the issue, I have been in dialogue with stakeholders, including meeting Marine Biopolymers, and you have my assurance that I will be doing all I can to protect environmental and fishing interests throughout.

You may wish to reference the below press release which I published on this for further information:

IAN BLACKFORD EXPRESSES CONCERN OVER SEA KELP DREDGING
LICENCING.

Ian Blackford MP is expressing concern at Crown Estate Scotland proposals to licence large blocks of the sea bed for industrial scale harvesting of kelp.

The issue was raised with him at a recent surgery by the group, Save Seil Sound who are worried that large scale uncontrolled dredging will lead to unsustainable destruction of the kelp forests, leaving them unable to recover.

Kelp forests are recognised as a productive and dynamic ecosystem in themselves, providing homes and food for many types of marine species, which themselves are part of the wider food chain, such as fish and shell fish for human consumption.

Seaweed has also seen an increase in demand for use in health foods, cosmetics and pharmaceuticals as well as fertilisers. To ensure this growth which also provides jobs, there are calls for it to be harvested carefully without causing lasting damage in order to create a sustainable industry.

A study is currently being undertaken by the Scottish Government into the use of mechanical dredging and what potential long term effects this form of harvesting could have on regeneration. It can take up to five years for kelp to re-grow to its original density.

While many jobs already depend on kelp harvesting in economically fragile communities, which could also benefit from an increase in production, the study will look carefully at the methods used, areas to be covered and long-term effect on the ecosystem.

If the study suggests proceeding with increased harvesting the Scottish Government would prefer to see licences granted for a number of smaller areas, rather than the huge blocks currently proposed by Crown Estate Scotland who have responsibility for the sea bed.

Ian Blackford said: "This is an area of great concern to many people not only working in kelp harvesting but also to the fishing industry, where a major change to conditions on the sea bed could adversely affect the habitat of the species they catch.

"From what I understand, kelp is fundamental to the well-being of a whole marine ecosystem which if not managed carefully ultimately has a detrimental knock-on effect right up the food chain, reducing populations and therefore yield.

"Although mechanical dredging of sea kelp is already carried out in other countries, I would urge caution, careful study and moderation in its further introduction to Scottish waters.

"People are rightly concerned that mechanical recovery could permanently destroy the basic structures from which the plant grows and this has to be very carefully looked into".

Thank you again for taking the time to get in touch.

Yours Sincerely



Ian Blackford
Member of Parliament for
Ross, Skye & Lochaber

Mechanical Kelp Dredging (Case Ref: IB12157)

Thursday, 29 November, 2018 13:03

From: ian.blackford.mp@parliament.uk

To: amorr65@btinternet.com

Dear Alasdair

For the last number of months the issue of mechanical kelp dredging has been at the forefront of people's minds.

I was contacted by yourself, as well as, meeting with scores of constituents and organisations along the West coast who had concerns over Marine Biopolymers application for dredging. I personally met with the company and despite acknowledging that they did come across as good people, I made it clear to them that I would not support any such application.

I was, therefore, delighted that Environment Secretary, Roseanna Cunningham, confirmed her support for the plan to prohibit the practice, as outlined in the Scottish Crown Estate Bill. Privately I was always confident that the plans would hit a brick wall, but without an extremely effective campaign from thousands of people locally, including yourself, victory may have been more difficult.

I would like to put on record my gratitude to you for contacting me on this issue, I am glad that common sense has prevailed.

Yours Sincerely,

Ian Blackford MP

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