

Mechanical dredging for kelp would be environmental vandalism, MSPs told

Ban on seaweed harvesting would boost fish stocks

By **KATRINE BUSSEY**

A Holyrood committee could vote to ban the mechanical harvesting of kelp, after more than 10,000 people backed a petition against the practice.

Ailsa McLellan, an oyster farmer from Lillapool, started the petition after the first application for industrial-scale dredging for the seaweed was submitted in Scotland.

The proposal, by Ayr-based firm Marine Biopolymers, could eventually see a reported 30,000 tonnes of the seaweed gathered each year off the country's west coast by specially adapted boats.

Fishermen and environmental campaigners warned such a move could be destructive to not just the kelp beds, but many other fish and shellfish in the surrounding waters.

Tomorrow, Green MSP Mark Ruskell will ask Holyrood's Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee to back a motion which would outlaw this mechanical dredging.

He will put forward an amendment to the Crown Estate Bill, which would only permit kelp harvesting where the plants can recover.

Ms McLellan, the founder of the No Kelp Dredging Facebook campaign, called for MSPs' support to "put an end to the insanity this application has caused across our coastal communities".

She insisted it would be "environmentally and economically disastrous" for Scotland if mechanical dredging for kelp was given the go-ahead.

The campaigner said: "Our wild kelp beds are incredible assets that belong to all of us. Kelp plays a significant part



A dogfish swims over a kelp bed of the kind that a Facebook petition is urging a Holyrood committee tomorrow to protect from the ravages of mechanical dredging.

in limiting climate change, locking up carbon and buffering the sea against increasing acidification.

"Kelp protects coastlines from the impact of waves and shifting sediment, which is important in areas such as Ulist which face serious coastal erosion. Wild kelp forests support a wide range of species essential for coastal businesses, including fishing, wildlife tourism and aquaculture.

"Existing businesses that harvest kelp do it responsibly and sustainably.

"The rules say that no kelp can be destroyed, that any by-catch of other species must be recorded, and that we must not alter the habitat. These are sensible rules, and they are obviously not compatible with mechanical dredging that tears kelp up by the roots.

"It would be environmentally and economically disastrous if this practice were to be allowed.

"I would urge MSPs from all parties to support this amendment and put an end to the anxiety this application has caused across our coastal communities.

The Sustainable Inshore Fisheries Trust (SIFT), which recently launched its Help The Kelp campaign, also spoke out in favour of a ban.

SIFT executive director Charles Millar said: "The industrial dredging of Scotland's kelp forests would seriously undermine the ability of our inshore waters to support a diverse, healthy population of marine species.

"In particular, our kelp forests play a crucial role as nursery habitats for numerous commercially-fished species, and reducing large portions of this habitat would be detrimental to the already fragile inshore fishing communities around our coastline."

HELP FOR KELP

"Kelp helps to limit climate change, locking up carbon and protecting the sea against acidification"

AILSA MCLELLAN
Lillapool oyster farmer

Fund for victims of crime not operational – five years after it was created



By **CATRIONA WEBSTER**

A fund to help the victims of crime is still not operational five years after it was approved in legislation.

The Victim Surcharge Fund, into which criminals will be made to pay to compensate victims, is expected to raise more than £1 million a year.

It was included in the Victims and Witnesses (Scotland) Act passed by MSPs in

2013, but is still not up and running. In response to a parliamentary question from the Liberal Democrats, justice secretary Humza Yousaf said:

"Establishment of the Victim Surcharge Fund (VSF) has taken longer than anticipated as we've undertaken detailed consideration and consultation with partners on the most effective mechanisms to operate and manage the VSF.

"Our intention is to announce further details on the fund following the summer parliamentary recess."

Mr Yousaf said the government is providing £7.9 million to third sector organisations whose work supports victims of crime.

It also emerged that another provision of the legislation is "not yet in force".

Under Police Remission Orders, officers can receive compensation if assaulted in the course of duty but none have been made to date.

Lib Dem justice spokesman Liam McArthur said: "The SNP government promised these schemes but have failed to get them off the ground. Between them, victims of crime and police officers have missed out on millions of pounds of criminal cash as a result."

A Scottish Government spokeswoman said: "We remain committed to the introduction of the Victim Surcharge Fund and have been

working closely with partners and the UK government to ensure the necessary legislative and other arrangements are in place to get the fund up and running as soon as possible."

"We anticipate being able to announce further details shortly.

"In the meantime we are providing £7.9m to 2000 or so third sector organisations whose work supports victims of crime, including Victim Support, Scottish Women's Aid,

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