



Sustainable Inshore Fisheries Trust

MEDIA COVERAGE

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News



Attenborough comes out fighting for kelp

Sir David Attenborough has insisted it is "absolutely imperative" that action is taken to preserve kelp forests in Scotland's waters.

The broadcaster made what is thought to be his first intervention into politics north of the border to call on MSPs to preserve the marine habitats, as they prepare to vote on new legislation which could ban dredging for kelp in Scottish waters.

Mark Ruskell, the Green MSP, successfully amended the Scottish Crown Estate Bill to ban the removal of entire kelp plants, allowing

harvesting only where the plant could recover.

The move was prompted by an application for dredging seaweed on an industrial scale. The Ayr-based firm Marine Biopolymers reportedly wanted to harvest 30,000 tonnes of kelp each year off the west coast using specially adapted boats. A petition against the application has been signed by 14,000 people.

Sir David, 92, who is vice-president of the conservation group Fauna and Flora International, said: "Charles Darwin was one of the first people to recognise just how



important kelp forests are for our oceans, comparing them in diversity to rainforests.

"These kelp forests — which can be found around the coast of the British Isles — not only form an important part of the food chain, but act as a vital habitat for a wide array of species.

"Their thick foliage

from predators, and provides a nursery ground where juvenile fish can mature in safety.

"Look closely among the intricate stems and fronds of kelp, and you will find a range of fascinating sea life, from invertebrates such as sea stars, anemones and limpets, to mammals such as sea otters. Many

of the fish species, such as cod, that are so important to us economically and culturally are also found here. For these reasons and many more (carbon storage being just one), it is absolutely imperative that we protect our kelp forests.

"It is perfectly possible to harvest them sustainably by removing

their fronds while leaving the rest of the plant intact. But dredging — or indeed any kind of harvesting that removes the whole plant — is a wholly short-sighted measure that risks the wholesale devastation of our kelp beds.

"I urge decision-makers to take the necessary action to

The naturalist has asked MSPs to support a ban on mechanical dredging

protect these vital, and globally important, habitats.

Charles Millar, director of the Sustainable Inshore Fisheries Trust, which supports the ban on dredging, welcomed Sir David's intervention.

"Kelp plants can be harvested — but only if they can grow back. This is the standard the existing, sustainable, hand-harvesting industry already has to meet. There should not be lower standards for big companies," he said.

"Last month the Scottish parliament's environment committee rightly voted to apply the same rules to all kelp harvesters.

"It is now up to the Scottish parliament as a whole to put this on the statute book when this legislation comes before it next month.

"I hope that MSPs of all parties will listen to science, to the fishers, to our coastal communities and of course to the world's most celebrated naturalist."

The trust has also set up a campaign called Help the Kelp.

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