

1st meeting of the Seaweed Review Steering Group

Paper 1 - Scope of Seaweed Review

Context

The parliamentary scrutiny of the Scottish Crown Estate Act 2019 raised a number of questions around the types and scale of wild seaweed activity across Scotland; how seaweed is handled through the licensing process and wider planning and regulatory framework; and highlighted a clear gap in scientific knowledge around the sustainability of mechanical harvesting of seaweed, with a particular interest and focus on *Laminaria hyperborea*.

The Scottish Crown Estate Act includes a restriction on removal of wild kelp from the seabed. The aim of the review is not to gather evidence to support removal of this section (15). Any recommendations to Ministers arising from this review will be subject to the normal policy, consultative and legislative processes.

Review Scope

Recognising the global climate emergency and the role kelp in particular plays in terms of coastal protection, supporting biodiversity, providing habitat and storing carbon, the aim of the review is to:

- establish a greater understanding of activity across Scotland by mapping what, where and how much wild harvesting and cultivation of all species is happening or planned and by whom;
- determine the extent to which the licensing regime including environmental assessments, stakeholder consultation and community engagement may apply to some or all of the methods identified and consider whether legislative or policy amendments to the current framework are required;
- identify how other comparable regimes are regulating or planning to regulate seaweed harvesting and cultivation;
- develop a common understanding of the growth opportunities and scenarios for the seaweed sector to guide research priorities;
- establish the locational base to better understand where seaweed resources are and the broader ecosystems which exist within and around them;
- outline the research and evidence-base requirements to identify and assess potential environmental impacts of seaweed harvesting on recovery and regrowth of harvested stocks, including consideration of the wider ecosystem benefits provided by seaweed, particularly but not exclusively kelp, so that we are better informed on the environmental impacts of further developing a harvested and cultivated seaweed sector in Scotland;

- identify what guidance may be required on the different harvesting and cultivating activities and licensing requirements to give clarity to stakeholders, regulators and industry;
- subject to outcomes of initial desk studies, consider the need for a pilot project, on an appropriate scale and design and at an appropriate location, to collect evidence on the potential environmental impacts of seaweed harvesting and on regeneration potential.