

Statement on the Seaweed Review

February 2022

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Following an amendment to the Scottish Crown Estate Act 2019, which prohibits the wild harvest of certain kelp species inhibiting the growth or recovery of the plant, Scottish Ministers committed to a review to gather evidence on the implications of seaweed harvesting by any method and consider the sustainable development of the seaweed sector. There is a long history of harvesting wild seaweed in Scotland, and although the existing Scottish seaweed industry is small, there is a growing interest in further developing the commercial seaweed-based industry, for example through creating new high value products from wild seaweed and through cultivating seaweed to supply various existing and emerging markets.

Since 2019, the Scottish Government, with the support of a diverse group of stakeholders comprising the Seaweed Review Steering Group, has published a number of key research outputs that address the objectives of the seaweed review. The final piece of research commissioned for the review, '[Understanding the potential scale for seaweed-based industries in Scotland](#)', was published on 22 February 2022. This latest report explores the key areas of growth potential for the seaweed sector and the wider economic and social impacts of possible growth scenarios.

While any licensable harvesting application will still have to comply with the provision in the Scottish Crown Estate Act, the findings of the review point to a need for a more comprehensive policy and regulatory framework for the emerging seaweed sector, as well as greater clarity on the pace and direction of travel from the industry itself.

Moving forward, Marine Scotland Directorate will respond to the first of these findings by seeking to ensure that any future revisions to the marine planning and licensing regime for both seaweed harvesting and cultivation activities are robust, proportionate and enabling, as well as ensuring the delivery of environmentally sustainable development. It will do this through the following actions:

- a) In August 2021, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands announced an independent [review of the current regulatory processes involved in aquaculture](#), which is considering seaweed cultivation, alongside finfish and shellfish regulatory frameworks. The future of Scotland's seaweed cultivation sector will also be considered as part of the development of a Scottish Government led Aquaculture Vision for Scotland.
- b) Marine Scotland Directorate is also working on the development of a [new seafood strategy](#) for 2022, focusing on actions to revitalise the sector consistent with a sustainable and natural capital approach.
- c) Marine Scotland Directorate is also actively reviewing the case for developing a new National Marine Plan. Any programme of work undertaken as a result of this review would include future planning for a sustainable seaweed sector.

Through these efforts, and others, Marine Scotland Directorate will continue to engage with all marine stakeholders to ensure that existing and emerging seaweed activities fit into our broader framework for managing multiple uses of the sea.

Whilst Marine Scotland Directorate's role is to provide an authorising environment consistent with our shared vision for the use of our seas, we recognise that other actors are often best placed to help focus the economic development of marine industries. The latest report highlights the potential opportunities and key barriers for the development of Scotland's small but vibrant seaweed industry. In recognition of these findings, Marine Scotland Directorate proposes to fund, in partnership with CES, a development post within the industry to support the growth ambitions of the Scottish seaweed sector. The scope of this role will be confirmed prior to recruitment in early 2022/23 and will help the sector articulate a strategic vision for its future and inform Marine Scotland Directorate's development of a regulatory framework that is appropriate for the industry as it develops over the next several years.

The Scottish Government recognises the crucial role that the Seaweed Review Steering Group members have played in guiding this review and sharing new and important evidence regarding Scotland's seaweed resources and seaweed sector. It wishes to thank them for their valuable contribution to this work. Marine Scotland Directorate will continue to engage with these stakeholders through various channels, but does not propose to hold further formal Steering Group meetings, unless required through unforeseen developments, as the original aims and objectives of the review have now been met.



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