



Eich cyf/Your ref P-05-1131
Ein cyf/Our ref LG/00129/21

Janet Finch-Saunders MS
Chair of the petitions committee

11th February 2021

Dear Janet,

Thank you for your letter of 20 January regarding a petition stating - "Subsequent to the start of dredging operations in Rhossili Bay, there has been a substantial and severe depletion of sand on the adjacent Rhossili beach." The petition calls for "Welsh Government to effect an immediate cessation of dredging operations pending a scientific review of sand depletion and its possible causes" and states that there appears to be a significant increase in the numbers of mollusc shell remains which "may become catastrophic for the extremely fragile ecosystems".

Marine aggregate dredging is strictly licenced by NRW Marine Licensing Team (MLT) on behalf of Welsh Ministers in accordance with provisions of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009. Licences are issued subject to environmental impact assessment (EIA) and also, if appropriate, coastal impact studies. Licence conditions are applied to effect compliance and monitoring and these are enforced by WG marine enforcement officers.

In order to ensure compliance with any licence conditions, aggregate dredging vessels are required to have an Electronic Monitoring Systems (EMS) on board (black boxes) which are monitored daily by The Crown Estate with the results sent to NRW MLT.

The nearest aggregate dredging site is at the Nobel Bank (site A476); some 19km south west where Llanelli Sand Dredging Ltd (LSD) has a marine licence to extract up to 2,000,000m tonnes of sand per year until 2023. The licence was issued as a renewal in 2016 being first issued in 2006 following a Public Inquiry. No marine aggregate dredging takes place near Rhossili beach, although the LSD vessel "Sospan Dau" does anchor in Rhossili bay awaiting the tide to return to its landing berth at Pwll.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Considerable work and studies were undertaken associated with a review of aggregates dredging policy in the late 1990's on sand resources, oceanography and biology of the Bristol Channel region. This led to policy supporting more offshore dredging, which is where it takes place now. These and other studies and reports have considered environmental and coastal impacts including a [technical review](#) of aggregate dredging monitoring results undertaken in October 2016.

Current understanding is the hydrodynamics of the Bristol Channel causes a limited west – east movement of sediment in deep waters with some lateral movement in shallower waters nearer the coast. Monitoring of the Nobel bank site, shows only local sediment movement across the area. None of the research or the monitoring shows any causal linkage to the coast, nor would this be expected due to the nature of the physical processes at work.

Accordingly, the petitioners' linkage of aggregate dredging to coastal sand movement is not supported by the available evidence.

The petition also refers to a significant increase in mollusc shell remains and starfish wash up, seemingly associated with storm actions and which could have ecological impact. Often, with storm events, shellfish are washed up - particularly on south westerly exposed beaches from Carmarthen bay eastwards to beyond Porthcawl. The main stranded species are razor clams (*Ensis siliqua* and *E arcuatus*), Egg shell razor (*Pharus legumen*), Sand gaper (*Mya arenaria*), Otter shell (*Iutraria lutraria*), Spiny cockle (*Acanthocardia echinata*), other small clam species, common cockles, blue mussels, burrowing sea urchin (*Echnocardium cordatum*) and in the spring common starfish. The oyster shells are relict – dating to the late 1800's when the species was locally more prolific. All of these species are widely distributed, abundant and the populations live in and are adapted to a mobile marine environment. Stranding following storm events are not considered to represent significant ecological impacts.

The evidence therefore suggests the observations at Rhossili are not related to aggregate dredging but, rather, relate to winter storms.

Yours sincerely,



Lesley Griffiths AS/MS

Gweinidog yr Amgylchedd, Ynni a Materion Gwledig
Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs

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