

P-05-778 Protect the Razor Clams on Llanfairfechan Beach

This petition was submitted by Vanessa L Dye and was first considered by the Committee in December 2017, having collected 459 signatures.

Text of Petition

We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to:

- commission a research study to ascertain the state of the health of the razor clam beds and their viability as a long term natural resource, and put in place a moratorium for fishing of razor clams until the research can report its findings;
- ratify a 'closed' season for the harvesting of razor clams aligned to the spawning season i.e. May to September;
- draw up regulations in addition to the minimum landing size of 10cm to include set quotas that individuals are allowed to take; and
- bring forward legislation and regulations to protect the razor clams on Llanfairfechan beach.

"The mass harvesting of razor clams on Llanfairfechan beach has been a matter of concern for many residents and conservationists for a number of years." (Ref: letter to Cabinet Secretary Lesley Griffiths AM from Janet Finch Saunders AM 28th July 2017.

Currently the only regulatory control on razor clams is that they must have a legal minimum landing size of 10cm, and there are checks relating to the control of clams ending in the food chain. Many residents are concerned about the apparent lack of procedures and/or regulations governing the taking of razor clams particularly in respect of designating a 'closed' season during spawning, quotas allowed, and the need for research evidence to be conducted on the razor clams to ascertain the impact on the local environment and ecosystem.

Since 2013 it has been noted by several sources that razor clams are being harvested in great numbers from Llanfairfechan beach. Evidence to support this claim has been documented on numerous occasions on social media. A recent request on the Llanfairfechan Noticeboard for any pictures or video

footage of those gathering the razor clams clearly shows that there are large numbers of people involved in this activity. The gathering of the razor clams generally takes place after a high tide.

Additional information

Just to provide some historic background about this issue. In 2013 the harvesting activity was brought to light by the Weekly News newspaper by Tom Davidson when it was noted that there was “A gang of more than 100 people harvesting huge amounts of razor clams.....” There were also concerns that illegal workers were being exploited and that the clams were being fished for commercial purposes. At the time, one resident said “they had seen similar scenes involving an increasing number of gatherers over the last few weeks. Residents are angry at the sheer number of harvesters with fears the local habitat could be damaged irreparably, with hundreds of clams taken off the beach regularly.” Whilst fears about the gatherers being used as part of modern slavery and the shellfish ending up in the food chain have been allayed by the ongoing efforts of the police and Food Standards Agency. The environmental consequences of this sustained and systematic removal of razor clams remains a major issue, which may impact on the other marine and bird life within the area, along with causing possible changes in the density of sand on the beach. There are some fears regarding the sand being unstable in places and people unfamiliar with the beach could easily get into difficulties e.g. some gatherers harvest the clams some distance away from the safety of the land. It has been quite disempowering and frustrating for ordinary citizens to watch the pillaging of an environmental resource and question why organisations who's remit is to protect the environment appear to be hamstrung because of the lack of appropriate procedures/laws. This is surprising given that Llanfairfechan beach is designated as a Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Protection Area (SPA) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC). 2013. Surely there must be regulations within these bodies of knowledge to tap into as a source to protect this imbalance in such an ecosystem?

Assembly Constituency and Region

- Aberconwy
- North Wales