

Additional evidence from Marine Energy Wales following their evidence session in relation to Marine Environment Management at the Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee meeting on 9 December 2021

Additional information around social licensing:

In the course of the session we were discussing the challenges of engaging stakeholders and getting buy in to projects from local communities which is not just a renewable energy issue (case in point – the Seagrass Ocean Rescue project was delayed by 6 months due to local community concerns about planting a meadow). WWF were a partner in the seagrass project and are now pursuing an Integrated Multi Trophic Aquaculture project in Pembrokeshire and intend to use Social Licensing principles to support project development.

The attached is the most comprehensive detail that I've been provided, but the context for this at the Car Y Mor (CYM) <https://carymor.wales/> project in St David's is as follows;

Seaweed farms perform important ecosystem services taking up excess CO₂, N, P from our bays and inlets and increasing biodiversity through the provision of sheltered habitat. They create highly nutritious food and feed products and important bio feedstocks (fermentation, bioplastics) without the need for arable land, fresh water, fertilizers, or pesticides. Seaweed farms provide opportunities for coastal communities, providing a means of revenue diversification for fishing and coastal community families. Farming reduces the pressure on ecologically critical wild seaweed beds. Seaweed farming has the potential to allow significant changes to the way the world produces food and contributes to addressing the Triple Challenge. The products from seaweed can be used to replace a significant portion of our food products with sustainable ingredients and lead to climate mitigation and an increase in marine biodiversity. As an island, the UK has significant opportunities to develop seaweed farming.

However, there is an increasing recognition that social opposition to aquaculture operations and operators is inhibiting the growth of the industry. Seaweed aquaculture is a potential component of sustainable "Blue Growth", and it is thus imperative to understand industry-community interactions for this sector. In addition there is a need to identify steps that can be taken to develop positive relationships between, on the one hand, seaweed cultivation activities and operators, and, on the other hand, local communities, communities of interest, and other stakeholders.

Key project outcomes/ links:

- WWF US focus on social licensing issues and the related issue of investigating ecosystem services of seaweed farming. The case study work with Car Y Mor is based around this and linked to further ecosystem evidence work
- Assessing stakeholder engagement / community awareness and understanding about local buy in and participation in planning.
- Aiming to address questions like
 - To what extent do people in the area know what is going on, can give feedback and if necessary, complain.
 - How are local fishing communities engaged
 - Do they had an opportunity to input to plans and to influence the approaches being used?
 - Does this change the use/feel/look of the area?
 - What is the plan for working with local organisations to ensure there is local sustainability built in – training etc... re. scaling up and sharing their model
 - What opposition/support is there from other local businesses or fishermen? Is there support from the community – and if so how broad is that?
 - What gov agencies have been involved?

WWF are also active on another project Plants Beyond Land (PEBL)

<https://www.plantsbeyondland.com/>

Across CYM and PEBL, the teams are focussing on ecological monitoring to build the evidence case of the ecosystem service benefits and to prove limited negative environmental impact of seaweed farms. This then feeds into the awareness/engagement work detailed above. CYM is then working with Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum on a) identifying the key stakeholders and community that need to be engaged to build support for CYM; b) assessing the engagement to date; c) developing and implementing a stakeholder engagement plan to build support for CYM and it's plans to scale up production.

If you'd like to pick up with the WWF team directly the best contact is

pnelson@wwf.org.uk – Penny Nelson.

Hope this helps. As MEW we are keeping a watching brief for learning that we can carry across to the MRE sector, as undoubtedly this is going to be an increasingly challenging area!