

## FISHERIES WORKING GROUP – 22 SEPTEMBER 2021

### BULLETIN: SEAWEED PROJECT

#### 1 Recommendation

##### 1.1 It is recommended that members note this report

#### 2 Discussion

- 2.1 On 12 March 2021 Northern Light Consulting Ltd (NLC) was commissioned by the council to carry out a Coastal Industries Diversification study on the feasibility of commercial seaweed cultivation and harvesting along the north coast of Aberdeenshire. The appointment of NLC followed a public procurement process (Public Contracts Scotland) with the budget for the work met by regeneration funds for Banff and Buchan. The project inception meeting between NLC staff and a small team of council officers (steering group) took place on 18 March 2021. Regular meetings ensued thereafter to ensure the project stayed on track.
- 2.2 Seaweed has been harvested from wild sources in Scotland for many years, eg as a fertiliser and as a pharmaceutical feedstock, but not at scale. Naturally occurring seaweed around the Scottish coast is increasingly highly valued for supporting marine biodiversity, sequestering carbon and buffering land-based pollutants entering the marine environment. So while seaweed as a commercial resource is projected to have considerable growth potential (eg for energy, food and animal feed production), the emphasis in Scotland lies firmly upon cultivated marine algae to serve larger scale markets, with wild harvesting, mainly derived from west coast sources, confined to small scale, niche market demand. The global seaweed market is projected to reach \$9Bn by 2024 (2017: \$4Bn), supplied mainly by countries in South East Asia.
- 2.3 The North Aberdeenshire coast is a very different proposition to the sheltered waters of the west coast of Scotland but while the natural environment is very challenging, Aberdeenshire's onshore infrastructure, highly diversified economy, skills, knowledge and research base offer considerable added value potential for a sustainable primary product like seaweed. Accordingly the purpose of the study was to assess seaweed markets, identify species suitable for cultivation and potential 'farm' sites, the production cycle, equipment and facilities required, regulatory issues, potential markets and routes to market (eg utilising pre-existing food processing capacity), investment costs/benefits, and the strategic fit of seaweed cultivation in what is an intensively utilised stretch of coastline (eg fishing, leisure, energy) which also happens to have been designated a Marine Protected Area ('Southern Trench') in December 2020. Effective engagement with commercial and community stakeholders was recognised as a key component of the study. Officer steering group members helped to facilitate NLC contact with industry, community and other representatives.
- 2.4 NLC worked diligently through their brief in accordance with the milestones set out in the commission and presented interim and draft reports to the

officer steering group on schedule and to the desired standard. In late May 2021, plans were laid for a public (virtual) presentation of the provisional findings. Chaired by Cllr Peter Argyle and held on the evening of 24 June, c.70 individuals tuned in to the presentation by NLC and helpful feedback was obtained, including comments on the desirability or otherwise of some of the potential seaweed farm sites (eg concerns from squid and inshore fishermen). Other comments related to the unforgiving sea conditions for offshore infrastructure, whether any adverse seaweed quality impacts would arise due to several wastewater outfalls along the coastline and the regulatory process. Coverage of the event was published in the Press and Journal. Further one-to-one engagement with key stakeholders then took place over the summer and the final report is due to be published shortly.

- 2.5 At all times the role of the council in this project has been made clear – that it is acting only to explore the practical feasibility of seaweed production, harvesting and marketing along the north coast of Aberdeenshire. The council will *not* be taking ownership as a developer – that will be a matter for a commercial operator, ideally in partnership with community and local business interests.

### 3 Scheme of Governance

Fisheries Working Group is able to consider this item in terms of its remit to provide a focus to enable issues and concerns across the wider fisheries sector in Aberdeenshire to be addressed.

### 4 Implications and Risk

Subject	Yes	No	N/A
Financial		x	
Staffing		x	
Equalities		x	
Fairer Scotland		x	
Town Centre First		x	
Sustainability		x	
Children & Young People's Rights and Wellbeing		x	

**Paul Macari**  
**Head of Service: Planning and Economy**

Report by Derek McDonald, Industry Support Executive (Rural & Maritime), 14 September 2021