



MEDIA COVERAGE

DAILY MAIL 25 10 2018

Daily Mail, Thursday, October 25, 2018 Page 13

# Fury as MSP urges poor to cut family size

**By Rachel Watson**  
Deputy Scottish Political Editor

A SENIOR Conservative MSP caused outrage after claiming Scottish benefit claimants should limit the number of children they have. Michelle Ballantyne told colleagues at Holyrood that those out of work 'cannot have as many children as they like'.

The Tory social security spokesman said it was 'fair' to place a cap on family size as many people in employment were forced to make tough decisions in a bid to 'pay their way'.

Mother-of-six Mrs Ballantyne later defended her comments and refused to apologise despite receiving a fierce reaction from opponents in the Scottish parliament chamber.

She admitted that she had claimed tax credits and child benefit previously. Mrs Ballantyne was speaking in a debate on inequality in Scotland and said that the UK Government's Universal Credit roll-out was a 'key part of reducing inequality in this country'.

But First Minister Nicola Sturgeon described its roll-out as an 'unfolding disaster'.

Mrs Ballantyne said: 'The two-child benefit cap, limiting tax credits and Universal Credit to a family's first two children, was also attacked.'

Mrs Ballantyne said: 'The two-child limit is about fairness. It is fair that people on benefit cannot have as many children as they like while people who work and pay their way and don't claim benefits have to make decisions about the number of children they can have.'

'Regardless of what others may say, it's a fact that Universal Credit is working for the many.'

Asked what she believes is the right number of children for the poor, Mrs Ballantyne said: 'I don't think there is a right number.'

Nationalist MSP Tom Arthur said the speech was 'six minutes of pompous, Victorian moralising that would have been better suited to the pages of a Dickens novel', and added: 'She should be utterly, utterly ashamed of herself.'

Scottish Labour leader Richard Leonard said: 'These comments by Mrs Ballantyne are abhorrent and show the true views held by senior Tory MSPs - nasty and archaic.'



Tory: Michelle Ballantyne

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**By Katrine Bussey**

# TV legend Sir David's warning to MSPs: Save Our Seaweed

DESTRUCTIVE dredging of Scotland's ecologically important kelp forests is 'short-sighted' and risks their 'wholesale devastation', Sir David Attenborough has warned.

The veteran broadcaster made what is thought to be his first intervention into politics north of the Border to call on MSPs to 'take the necessary action' to preserve the marine habitats.

He made the plea as Holyrood prepares to vote on new legislation, which if passed, would ban dredging for kelp in Scottish waters.

Green MSP Mark Ruskell successfully amended the Scottish Crow Estate Bill to ban the removal of entire kelp plants, allowing harvesting only where the plant could recover.

Sir David stressed it was 'absolutely imperative that we protect our kelp forests', saying they provide a vital habitat for a 'wide array of species'.

He spoke out after the first application for industrial-scale dredging of the sea-bed in Scotland sparked a petition signed by more than 14,000 people.

A special **Help the Kelp campaign** was also set up by the Sustainable Inshore Fisheries Trust (SIFT).

Art-based firm Marine Biopolymers wanted to harvest 36,000 tons of kelp each year off the West Coast by specially adapted boats.

But Sir David, who is the vice-president of the conservation group Fauna and Flora International (FFI), said dredging in this way would be a 'wholly short-sighted measure that risks the devastation of kelp beds'.

He said: 'Charles Darwin was one of the first people to recognise how important kelp forests are for our oceans, comparing them to diversity in rainforests.'

These kelp forests not only form an important part of the food chain but also act as a vital habitat for a wide array of species.

Their thick foliage offers food and safety from predators, and provides a nursery ground where juvenile fish can mature in safety.

'Look closely and you will find a range of sea life, from invertebrates such as sea stars, anemones and limpets, to mammals such as sea otters.'

'Many fish species, such as cod, that are so important to us economically and culturally, are also found here.'

He added: 'For these reasons and more - carbon storage being one only - it is absolutely imperative we protect our kelp forests.'

'It is perfectly possible to harvest them sustainably by removing their fronds while leaving the rest of the plant intact. But dredging - or indeed any kind of harvesting that removes the whole plant - is a wholly short-sighted measure that risks the wholesale devastation of our kelp beds.'

SIFT executive director Charles Millar welcomed Sir David's intervention, and urged MSPs to keep the ban in the legislation when it comes before the Scottish parliament in November.

He said: 'Kelp plants can be harvested but only if they can grow back. This is the standard the existing, sustainable, hand-harvesting industry already has to meet. There should not be lower standards for big companies.'

Last month, the Scottish parliament's Environment Committee rightly voted to apply the same rules to all kelp harvesting.

It is now up to the Scottish parliament as a whole to put this on the statute book when the legislation comes before it next month.

'I hope that MSPs of all parties will listen to the science, to the fishers, to our coastal communities and of course to the world's most celebrated naturalist.'

Meanwhile FFI marine community support officer the Scotland's West Coast representative, Kerri Whitehead said: 'This is an issue that is of deep concern to West Coast communities. This collective stance alone should be compelling enough for the Scottish Government to act.'




Crucial: Veteran broadcaster Sir David Attenborough has urged ministers to ban kelp dredging machines, left, in Scottish waters.

## £330bn cost of oil extraction

UP TO £330 billion could be spent on oil and gas extraction in the UK Continental Shelf over the next 32 years, says a study.

Professor Alex Kemp and Linda Stephens of the University of Aberdeen said financial simulation modelling to assess key exploration and development risks.

Using a model of \$70 per barrel of oil and \$40 per therm of gas, they found more than 17 billion barrels of oil equivalent could be recovered by 2050. Under

this scenario, development expenditures could accumulate to £35 billion at today's prices, while operating expenditures may be £32 billion.

The study concluded: 'The remaining potential in the UK Continental Shelf is very substantial. The important caveats are that the benefits of the painfully achieved cost reductions and the productivity gains from enhanced production efficiency have to be maintained.'

## Photo-claim minister quits

A MARRIED minister facing allegations he tried to persuade a young woman to send him an explicit photo has quit his post.

The Rev David Macdonald has resigned as assistant minister of Back Free Church on Lewis after it emerged that police investigators reported their findings to the procurator fiscal.

The alleged requests for an explicit picture are said to have been made before he became a minister.

In March, seven months after he took up

the job, the 28-year-old was suspected of sending images.

The church, which passed the resignation to police, said it would be 'unrepresentative' to reveal further.

Although suspended, Mr Macdonald was still officially the church's minister.

He received a letter from the procurator fiscal last month asking for details of the alleged