



Sustainable Inshore Fisheries Trust

Facilitating the development of sustainable seaweed farming in Scottish waters

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Seaweed farming is a small but expanding industry in Scotland. In order to promote its sustainable expansion, the Sustainable Inshore Fisheries Trust (SIFT) has published a report on Facilitating development of the seaweed cultivation industry in Scotland.

The report, authored by Dr Kyla Orr, a seaweed farmer and consultant, concludes that the sector faces a range of challenges, including a lack of processing facilities, poor supply chain coordination and under-developed markets - and that these challenges will only be overcome if there is a coherent national strategy to do so. Without such a strategy there is a risk that, like the salmon farming sector, seaweed cultivation will become dominated by well-capitalised corporations, with little connection to Scotland's coastal communities.

The report proposes action which could overcome these challenges and in so doing would address the *'mistrust, dislike, and vitriol'* between the industry and other stakeholders that was notably identified in the Scottish finfish aquaculture sector by Professor Griggs in his recent Review of aquaculture regulatory process. The proposed actions would also address challenges identified in Marine Scotland's report on the Potential scale of Scottish seaweed-based industries and ensure that Scottish seaweed farming could share in the growth projected for the fast developing European seaweed farming industry (seaweedeurope.com).

KEY RECOMMENDATION

A national strategy

Scottish seaweed farming would benefit from a national strategy for growth. This should set out target markets, key areas for processing innovation and methods to overcome supply chain bottlenecks.

The Scottish Government should develop a national strategy, potentially on a new formal seaweed 'platform' for Scotland, which brings together producers, processors, technology providers, buyers and other marine stakeholders.

KEY RECOMMENDATION

Improved cooperation

Scottish seaweed farming would benefit from farmer-led cooperation so individual farmers can pool stock, share processing facilities, and collaborate in marketing seaweed products. This would make small scale farms more viable and ensure that ownership and control of the seaweed industry remains in local communities. Cooperatives bring cost-sharing and market-power benefits for small farmers, but also have disadvantages, including slower decision making and challenges over profit sharing. Consideration should also be given to establishing hybrids between cooperatives and investor-owned firms - as is common in the European agriculture industry.

The Scottish Government should promote the establishment of shared enterprises, including cooperatives.

KEY RECOMMENDATION

Infrastructure and supply chain development

The lack of processing infrastructure in Scotland is a major barrier to development of a profitable, sustainable and locally controlled seaweed cultivation industry. Experience from the USA and Norway shows that secure access to processing facilities at an early stage of industry development is critical to success. Sharing existing facilities with other industries may ease this process. Any facilities must meet the need for:

- Energy efficient and low carbon methods of rapidly stabilising seaweed after harvest to increase storage time before processing;
- Efficient solutions for processing large volumes of cultivated seaweed over a short time;
- Effective supply chain logistics for farmed seaweed.

Seaweed farmers or cooperatives must establish processing facilities at an early stage and consider partnering with processors in other industries.

KEY RECOMMENDATION

Market development

UK seafood and agriculture sectors show that initial prioritisation of local markets provides a firmer basis for market development than international markets do. This would involve:

- Raising consumer awareness of how to eat or use seaweed via outreach and education;
- Developing new value-added end products for UK seaweed;
- Creating branding which conveys the environmental benefits of seaweed products;
- Differentiating Scottish seaweed products from overseas imports.

Seaweed farmers or cooperatives should prioritise the development and accessing of UK markets.

KEY RECOMMENDATION

Knowledge sharing and research

Experience in the USA and Norway shows that knowledge sharing is vital for the growth and viability of small-scale seaweed farming. Both countries have successful knowledge sharing platforms which involve producers, technology providers, processors and end-users. A Scottish platform could be further strengthened by including academia and researchers.

The Scottish Government should support knowledge sharing on any proposed seaweed platform.

KEY RECOMMENDATION

Financial support for seaweed farming

New enterprises often find it difficult to access loans and grants. This is particularly the case in novel sectors like seaweed farming. There is a clear need for assistance to fund capital equipment, studies of farming methods, processing and product development, and the development of sales channels and business plans. Funding should focus sector-wide rather than on individual enterprises.

Seaweed farmers and seaweed cooperatives should promote targeted industry support, to align with the priorities set out in a national strategy and assist the development of small scale, sustainable seaweed farming.



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For more information on our work, please visit our website www.sift.scot or contact us on info@sift.scot

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