

SBB: SAVE BALLYNESS BAY ACTION GROUP

Last week's edition of the Donegal News carried an article in relation to aquaculture in Ballyness Bay. It is important to address some of the statements made in that article.

From the outset, SBB has focussed on presenting the facts. Not wishful thinking, not vague opinion, not statements with no basis for them. The facts.

The facts as presented by SBB are based on careful scientific, social and economic analysis. They show clearly that Ballyness Bay *in its entirety*, which is designated in Irish and EU law as a Special Area of Conservation and a Special Protected Area, and is not on the Department's list of Shellfish production designated areas, is not a suitable location for industrial shellfish production. If you wish to read those facts, then go to www.saveballynessbay.com and look under "Publications" on the menu bar for SBB's submission to the Aquaculture Licencing Appeals Board (ALAB).

SBB has always made it clear that we have no issue with locals wishing to pursue a business in aquaculture. Our grievance is with the Government and its agencies which are inflicting a grave disservice on such people, and on the whole community, by encouraging them to invest their resources in an area which is wholly unsuitable for the purpose. There have been two previous attempts at oyster production in the area, both of which failed because of the instability of the substrate within the Bay.

Ballyness Bay is the wrong location for industrial aquaculture on

1. Scientific/Environmental grounds, as set out in detail in our submission to ALAB, showing clearly the potential for serious environmental damage and disruption to a wide range of protected habitats and species.
2. Economic grounds. As our survey of local employers clearly showed, the local economy is heavily dependent on the undamaged purity of the Bay which draws visitors to its outstanding natural beauty and extensive wildlife .
3. Social/Community health grounds. During our campaign to save the Bay, hundreds of people have testified to the recreational and health-giving benefits of the unspoiled nature of the Bay. This would be undermined and degraded by the introduction of industrial shellfish production with its thousands of metal trestles embedded in the Bay and bringing with it the associated problems of industrial traffic, rubbish and general pollution which is a feature of this industry in so many locations.

The article speaks repeatedly of "seeking to find an environmentally friendly way of conducting aquaculture in Ballyness Bay." This is a noble ambition. There are aquaculture installations all along the coast from West Cork to North Donegal, and in many locations

worldwide. No one has yet managed to find an environmentally friendly way of doing it. The many destroyed coastal habitats in France, UK and beyond, provide stark evidence of that.

The article states that the hope is “to be able to farm a very restricted area of the Bay.” According to the Dept. of Food, Agriculture and the Marine website, the area sought is 30.7 hectares (75 acres or 24.3 Croke Parks). Licences were granted for 24 hectares. We do not know of any farmer who would consider this to be a very restricted area. Furthermore, no mention is made of what use of the foreshore and adjacent land would be required to support the activity; the movement of vehicles, the stacking of metal cages and other equipment. In passing, it is perhaps worth noting that the area in question is well in excess of the 15 hectares applied for by the “French” referred to in the article.

There is an astonishing statement that all this “would have no discernible impact whatsoever upon the natural beauty and ecological balance of the area.” As for having no discernible impact, it is worth noting that the Dept. of Agriculture had eventually to send a team to the Bay to remove the dangerous debris, including rusting steel structures, left behind after previous failed aquaculture ventures. It is also difficult to understand how someone drawn to the area to encounter the “natural beauty “of the Bay would have their experience enhanced by being confronted with thousands of metal oyster trestles spread out before them. With regard to no impact on the ecological balance, we would like to see the evidence to support this assertion as our research referred to above shows just the opposite. It is completely contrary to the considered opinions of environmental experts consulted by the Save Ballyness Bay Group.

The article correctly states that “Fishing and harvesting the seashore have been part of community life for generations” and that “ Local communities have every right to earn their living from the sea in an environmentally friendly and sustainable way as they have done for generations.” We agree with that wholeheartedly and we would like that to continue. It is of course obvious to anyone that industrial shellfish production has nothing whatever to do with that. The industrial shellfish industry has *not* been part of community life for generations. It is a recent, repeated failure which left a legacy of dangerous debris. It is neither environmentally friendly nor sustainable. It involves the introduction of a foreign species viz pacific oysters, which are wreaking havoc on the environment in other locations where they have been introduced. It unavoidably involves practices which disrupt and endanger the local ecology. In short, it poses the greatest single threat to that right of the local community which the article purports to defend.

Referring to those supporting aquaculture industry in the Bay, the article notes that they “object to the French company’s licence application.” It is not clear from this if they have lodged individual appeals with ALAB, which is the only meaningful way to object. SBB and several other concerned locals have done this, at considerable expense. A visit to ALAB’s website should clarify the matter.

The article goes on to say that they “seek to preserve this special area for generations to come.” We can only say that promoting, in a Special Area of Conservation and an area of pristine natural beauty with an ecology of international importance, the establishment of an industrial complex with a well established track record of environmental degradation is a strange way to go about achieving this objective.

Ballyness Bay is a rare environmental jewel of huge local and international importance. There are few such places left. It will be a permanent scandal and a stain on all responsible if it is cynically pillaged for selective commercial gain and lost forever to the community and the world.