Alab, Info

From: E NíChonnachain [redacted]
Sent: Sunday 11 October 2026 23:35
To: Alab, Info
Subject: Objection to oyster farming licences in Ballyness Bay

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I am writing to add my support to those of the Save Ballyness Bay (SBB) committee who are appealling the granting of oyster farming licences in Ballyness Bay, Donegal. The bay was awarded SAC status (Special Area of Conservation 001090) by the Department of Agricultute & the Marine, in recognition of the many protected and rare species and habitats in the Bay.
Bafflingly the same Department then awarded shellfish farming licences in the Bay, and the local community have now been fighting for years- through several appeals, funding a legal team they can ill afford and spending countless hours researching and campaigning- to protect the bay against their own government, who themselves previously stated the Bay had deserved protection.
In an area of longstanding low employment with few public amenities available to the population for recreation, the bay and its beaches are the community's main area for exercise as well as a valuable sanctuary for wildlife.
Aside from the pollution caused by these shell-fish farms, in Donegal we are all familiar with the ugly sight of abandoned black cages jutting out of the sands on other beaches where these licences were granted. Once the initial government grant awarded to these "fishermen" is used up, and the "farmers" have to spend their own money on feeding the shellfish, many cages are abandoned and there is no onus on owners to remove the cages, which remain an unsightly hazard for decades, preventing safe swimming walking or boating. Tourism is one of the few areas of employment, with visitors coming to windsurf, sail, walk and fish, all of which will be impacted by these ugly and structurally dangerous cages. The "farms" do not create employment to more than one or two people in the area to replace what is lost.
Ballyness bay has many mud-flats and sandflat areas with absolutely no water at low tide. Pacific oysters perform poorly in these conditions (in the past licence applications were refused here on this basis). This greatly increases the likelihood of failed oyster beds being abandoned, and the damage to local wildlife will have been for nothing.
A study performed by British Antartic Study and Trinity College researchers in 2019 showed that in deeper waters Pacific oysters are better at filtering the more nutritious plankton from seawater and they then outcompete the native oyster, leading to death of the native species (which is increasingly endangered and has been named an Action Plan species by the EU because it contributes to other species whereas the invasive species does the opposite).
In either scenario the loser is the local native wildlife.
Pacific oysters used in farming are supposed to be triploid, and unable to breed, but evidence published recently states that up to 20% of these oysters may be able to reproduce. Since one spawning oyster can produce millions of young, and these oysters are shown to out-compete native species for food, even a tiny percentage remaining fertile would be enough to wipe out our endangered wild native oyster population in the Bay.

The Department has committed to increasing shellfishing in Ireland, and encourages this practice with grants. Potential shellfish farmers have a convenient list on the Department's website of beaches and bays awarded Special Areas of Conservation for their unspoilt clean waters, perfect for exploitation for shellfish farming. (This SAC status and any protection it infers to other species will inevitably be lost once the fishfarm pollutes the waters). Unfortunately it seems this is yet another short-sighted example of the state offering up invaluable and irreplaceable natural resources for small short-term gain.
For each appeal against these licences the local community in its entirety gathers behind the SBB campaign and they fundraise yet again to pay for scientific research and informed legal argument. In each case the opposing side merely refutes the claims made but offers absolutely no evidence to back their rebuttals. It is always a pitifully weak defence and yet it has thus far inexplicably been given equal weight by ALAB.
Please end these years of stress to a small but tight-knit rural community -and restore its faith in a government it has felt long-forgotten by- by refusing planning for these oyster farms in Ballyness Bay for once and for all.

Thank you
Emily Moran
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