Alab, Info

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We strongly object to the apparent disregard shown by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) and the Aquaculture Licences Appeals Board (ALAB) for the overwhelming opposition within the local community to shellfish farming in Ballyness Bay. Throughout the licensing and appeals processes, there has been a serious concern that the interests of the oyster licence applicants have been given greater consideration than the views of the community and the potential impacts on the bay.

We are deeply concerned by ALAB's apparent failure to give adequate weight to the well-founded concerns raised regarding the bay's natural environment and the protection of its rare and endangered wildlife. We are particularly concerned about the need to comply with relevant EU environmental legislation and directives designed to safeguard sensitive habitats and biodiversity.

Of particular concern is the potential introduction of non-native species, including clams and Pacific oysters, into Ballyness Bay. There is a significant risk that these species could establish themselves, reproduce and spread into the surrounding environment, potentially causing long-term ecological damage that would be difficult, if not impossible, to reverse.

Ballyness Bay is a much-loved and highly valued natural amenity for the local community and visitors. It provides an important setting for walking, swimming, boating, angling, windsurfing, art and many other recreational activities. These activities contribute enormously to the health, well-being and quality of life of those who live in and visit the area. Commercial shellfish farming could undermine this enjoyment through increased pollution, litter, noise and ongoing disturbance, both during the day and at night.

The bay is also an increasingly popular beauty spot along the Wild Atlantic Way, attracting visitors whose spending makes a valuable contribution to the local economy. The installation of extensive arrays of oyster trestles would significantly alter the natural appearance of the bay, creating an unacceptable visual intrusion on this cherished landscape. This would diminish its appeal to both residents and tourists and could negatively affect the tourism-based businesses and livelihoods that depend on the area's natural beauty.

Experience in other locations where commercial shellfish farming has been introduced has raised serious concerns about its potential long-term environmental and visual impacts. We do not want Ballyness Bay to suffer similar consequences. Once the natural character and ecological balance of the bay have been damaged, restoration may be extremely difficult or impossible.

This is an issue of profound importance to our community. The future of Ballyness Bay must not be determined without proper consideration of the people who live here, the recreational and economic value of the bay, and the need to protect its unique natural environment for future generations.

For all of these reasons, and the many additional concerns raised by the local community, **we strongly object to the granting of aquaculture licences in Ballyness Bay.** We call on the relevant authorities to give full and proper consideration to the community's objections and to prioritise the long-term protection of the bay's environment, biodiversity, natural beauty and value as a public amenity.