



Cynulliad National
Cenedlaethol Assembly for
Cymru Wales

The Petitions Committee

Completion Report

**Report of the Petitions Committee's consideration of
P-03-115 – Save Sker Beach**

June 2008

Presented

25 March 2008

Ruled Admissible

26 March 2008

Initial Consideration

24 April 2008

The committee agreed to:

- Write to the Welsh Assembly Government to request information on the monitoring of dredging in the Bristol Channel.

(See Annex 1 for the relevant extract from the transcript meeting of the meeting on 24 April and Annex 2 for the letter sent to the Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing)

Further Consideration

11 June 2008

The Committee considered a response from the Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing and agreed to:

- Close the petition as:
 - The Committee agreed with the Assembly Governments position, that based on current scientific evidence, there is no confirmed connection between coastal change and dredging
 - Independent reviews, paid for by the relevant dredging company, are already carried out in Helwick Bank by the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Agricultural Science.

(See Annex 1 for the relevant extract from the transcript of the meeting on 11 June and Annex 3 for the letter received from Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing)

**Petitions Clerk
June 2008**

Annex 1

Extracts from Petitions Committee meetings

24 April 2008

Val Lloyd: We have three new petitions, the first two of which are similar, although there is a difference. The underlying theme of P-03-115 Save Sker Beach and P-03-117 Save Our Sands—Gower is the same, although the particulars vary in that we have had a response in relation to the petition to save Sker beach to say that some monitoring is carried out. The Save our Sands—Gower petition asks us specifically to monitor the environmental impact of sand dredging from the Helwick bank.

Bethan Jenkins: I have looked at the Record, and I know that Dr Dai Lloyd raised the issue of sand dredging in the Assembly last year. The Minister with responsibility for this has moved forward to 2009 an independent review into sand dredging, which was set to take place in 2010. That is the latest information that I have. I do not know whether that would be sufficient for the petitioners, or whether they would want to see it this year, or even immediately. However, I know that that commitment has been made by the Minister.

Val Lloyd: Are you talking in relation to either, or both?

Bethan Jenkins: I believe that it was an independent study of the whole area.

Val Lloyd: Yes, because it would be linked, would it not?

Bethan Jenkins: I may need to be corrected, but I believe that it is for the whole area.

Andrew R.T. Davies: Looking at the first petition, a pretty comprehensive study has been done of the work, as mentioned in the notes. In our role as committee members, we can never have enough information on issues such as this, because—and I believe that you are from the area, Chair—it is a burning issue, is it not?

Val Lloyd: Yes, it is. Although my constituency does not abut the Gower coastline, it is of concern to all the residents there, because they use the beaches.

Andrew R.T. Davies: However, the second petition refers to a specific private company, and the fact that an obligation should be placed on it; I am not sure how that obligation could be put on it if it already has a valid licence in place. I do not know how you could answer directly what the petition is asking for—I am not 100 per cent sure how you would move that forward. The wider issue of sand dredging, and the erosion of beaches, affects the whole coastline. Some form of correspondence from the Minister responsible to clarify the situation might be the correct way forward.

Val Lloyd: Yes, I think so. The comments that I made to you were unofficial, not official. We have not had an official response—we have not written to anyone, but we had an unofficial response regarding the first petition.

Andrew R.T. Davies: Could I pick up on one small housekeeping point? The petition serial number is 117, but it is down as 116 on page 3. I presume that they refer to the same petition. Is that just a housekeeping point?

Val Lloyd: Yes, I think so, because they are distinct.

Andrew R.T. Davies: If it follows through the process, that one digit—

Val Lloyd: No, because we will have had something else in between, probably, will we not?

Mr Sanchez: I think that it may refer to 116; I apologise for that—we will check that

Andrew R.T. Davies: Sker Beach is 115, so we have either missed one, or it is just a housekeeping point.

Mr Sanchez: I believe that it is a housekeeping point.

Val Lloyd: You are very observant, Andrew.

Bethan Jenkins: We need to clarify whether the private company is going to make its own monitoring processes or whether the independent study by the Government will reflect that.

Val Lloyd: It is always preferable to have an independent comment, rather than the company itself—that is not a comment on this specific company, but, in general, I believe that people have greater regard if it is an independent monitoring. Therefore, we will start by writing to the Welsh Assembly Government to determine whether any monitoring has been, or is about to be, undertaken, and we will bring it forward at another meeting

11 June 2008

Val Lloyd: The last petitions on the agenda are those on dredging in the Bristol channel. We had two petitions on this, which we ran together because they were very similar—Save Sker Beach, and the Gower Petition—Save our Sands, both of which were signed by a large number of people. We have had a letter from the Minister, Jane Davidson, giving us her response, about the monitoring that is taking place. Does anyone wish to comment?

Andrew R.T. Davies: To be fair, the Minister is very detailed in her response; many surveys have been conducted, and she alludes to one survey in particular. I bow to your knowledge on this, Chair, as it is in your patch—I appreciate that it is not in your constituency, but it is in your neck of the woods.

Val Lloyd: One is—the Gower one.

Andrew R.T. Davies: Again, there is the opportunity for petitioners to come and give us evidence, but, as I said, not being an expert on this, or having an understanding of the locality to any great depth, I would defer to your good self on this, Chair.

Val Lloyd: It is a difficult one, because there are opposing scientific views, and I do not believe that any of us is eligible to comment with any great accuracy on which view is the right one. We can only go on what I would call the expert view, as given to us by the Minister. As she states in her letter:

'It is the Assembly Government's position, based on the scientific advice and information available to it, that there is no confirmed connection between coastal change and dredging. However, a precautionary approach is being taken, and each licence includes provisions for suspension of operations if clear environmental harm, relating to the operation, is discovered. This approach can be shown in the Government View issued for Nash Bank, where dredging is being phased out'.

It is not convinced that there is a connection, and there is independent monitoring of the conditions—the monitoring is not done by those who hold the licence. We need to convey that to the petitioners, because I do not believe that there is anything more that we can do.

Andrew R.T. Davies: Without closing the petition at this stage, could we convey that to the petitioners? As I said, it is a technical issue, is it not? I am convinced by the Minister's reply, to a degree, because you have to bow to greater knowledge, and obviously it is an independent survey. However, it is a controversial issue, and these two petitions have sizeable support. I do not know whether, on return of their correspondence, there is mileage in having them in to give evidence.

Val Lloyd: I do not think there is, Andrew. The Minister points out in the fourth paragraph of her letter that, for Nash bank and Helwick bank, reports are sent to the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science for an independent review—it is paid for by the dredging company, but it is not done by it. She has said that they are taking a precautionary approach. I am not an expert, but an equal body of evidence says that this is caused by the natural tidal flow.

I accept that there are many signatories to these petitions—I am sure that they could get even more people to sign them if they went down any of the local high streets. However, I do not believe that there is anything more that we can do, because we are not in a position to stop the dredging—the Minister has said that there is a limit on the one on Nash bank, which is being closed in 2010. I do not see what more we can do. What I am saying is that we may be raising some degree of false hope should we invite them in. I do not believe that there is anything that we could fairly and squarely take forward. Do you have a view on this, Kirsty?

Kirsty Williams: It is difficult, coming to this late, and I am not sure what the past form is by the committee.

Val Lloyd: Nothing really—it is as you see.

Kirsty Williams: Can we do anything more that would be useful? I can imagine that committee members tend to want to give people as many opportunities as they can, but the system would become unsustainable if we did that. So, if the advice is that we cannot do anything further, I think that we should draw it to a close.

Val Lloyd: That is where I was coming from. The Minister has been quite frank and open, and has told it like it is, and we would just be raising expectations far above what is possible. What is the purpose of asking the petitioners to come back?

Andrew R.T. Davies: I defer to you, Chair.

Val Lloyd: It is a difficult call. I go to the same areas and see the changes made since I was a little girl—some considerable time ago—but I am not in a position to

argue against the scientific evidence. So, under the circumstances, the petition is best closed.

Annex 2

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau

Petitions Committee

Jane Davidson AM
Minister for Environment, Sustainability
and Housing
Welsh Assembly Government
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

Bae Caerdydd / Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd / Cardiff CF99 1NA

Our ref: PET-03-115/117

30 April 2008

Dear Jane

PETITIONS – SAVE SKER BEACH / GOWER PETITION – SAVE OUR SANDS

The Petitions Committee considered these two petitions, relating to sand dredging, for the first time on 10 April 2008. During the meeting the Committee agreed to write to you to request information on any monitoring of dredging in the Bristol Channel that is being undertaken by the Welsh Assembly Government. Specifically, can you clarify whether any monitoring has been, or is about to be, undertaken on the impact of sand dredging on the erosion of sand from Sker Beach (P-03-118) and from any beaches on the Gower (P-03-117).

I should be grateful if you could consider this request and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



**Val Lloyd,
Chair, Petitions Committee**

Enc. Petition Wordings

Annex 3

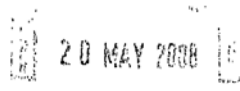
Jane Davidson AC/AM
Y Gweinidog dros yr Amgylchedd, Cynaliadwyedd a Thai
Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing



JDS

Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

Eich cyf/Your ref PET-03-
115/117



Val Lloyd AM
Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

APJD

19 May 2008

Dear Val,

Thank you for your letter of 30th April 2008 regarding the monitoring of dredging in the Bristol Channel.

A major research project, the Bristol Channel Marine Aggregates Research Project, was commissioned by the former Welsh Office, the former Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the Crown Estate between September 1996 and August 2000. The objectives of the study were to further our understanding of the sediment transport regime and the extent to which the sediment deposits interlinked in the Bristol Channel. The data in this study was independently updated in October 2003 and is due to be updated again in 2008-09.

Monitoring is an integral part of the conditions imposed on any licence issued, and as our understanding of the best methods improves, these requirements are built into new licence agreements, bearing in mind that the conditions must be relevant and reasonable to impose on the applicants.

For example, we receive bathymetric and beach monitoring reports several times a year as a condition of the Nash Bank dredging licence and the beach monitoring extends to Rest Bay. These monitoring reports are sent to the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas) for independent review. Similar monitoring conditions apply to the licence for Helwick Bank, and in both cases they are paid for by the applicant and independently reviewed by Cefas.

In specific relation to Rest Bay, the conclusion from Cefas is that any changes in beach conditions at Rest Bay are extremely unlikely to be caused by dredging operations. The relevant quote is below:

'With regard to Rest Bay, the changes observed are likely to be part of the natural cycle of change. There is no information in these reports on the offshore setting, so no clear conclusions regarding the significance of the changes, which have taken place, can be made.'

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
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Whilst changes in these beaches might, in addition to many other factors, relate partly to the occurrence of strong winds from the SE, (i.e. which might drive waves across the seafloor over parts of Nash Bank), there is no obvious physical mechanism where beach changes could be meaningfully related to recent changes in Nash Bank.'

It is the Assembly Government's position, based on the scientific advice and information available to it, that there is no confirmed connection between coastal change and dredging. However, a precautionary approach is being taken, and each licence includes provisions for suspension of operations if clear environmental harm, relating to the operation, is discovered. This approach can be shown in the Government View issued for Nash Bank, where dredging is being phased out, concluding in 2010.

If you need any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours,



Jane Davidson AM
Y Gweinidog dros yr Amgylchedd, Cynaliadwyedd a Thai
Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing