

P-05-1131 Immediate cessation of dredging operations off the Gower coast pending evaluation of adverse effects, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 23.02.21

Thank you very much for your reply and for the inclusion of the Minister's response.

However, we strongly believe that the Minister may have been misled when requesting information for her response. Our family has the benefit of a static caravan directly overlooking Rhossili beach and bay, at Hillend. As occasional stargazers, we also have the use of a powerful telescope and binoculars with which we have observed the vessel "Sospan Dau" on numerous occasions, apparently dredging within the bay. The vessel has frequently been witnessed in position approximately mid-point between Worm's Head and Burry Holmes for many hours, well in excess of the necessary inter-tidal times which are claimed. At these times, significant turbulence has been obvious in the water surrounding the vessel, indicating a high likelihood that the dredging process has been underway. The vessel has also appeared to be lower in the water at the end of its stints in the bay, as deduced from observation of the plimsoll line.

As a qualified skipper, I have a good understanding of tidal streams and vessel movement. I have witnessed Sospan Dau apparently returning from the Nobel Bank and anchoring. We have also noted other occasions when, as stated above, the vessel has emerged from the Loughor estuary and spent many hours in Rhossili Bay before returning. At these times, the same turbulence has been observed around the vessel.

I realise that all commercial vessels are required to be equipped with AIS transponders which record the vessel details, including course, activity, speed, bearing, etc. However, these can easily be programmed with insufficient or incorrect information, or even switched off entirely, although I am not suggesting that the vessel's master has done so. The point is that AIS information cannot, solely, be relied upon as an accurate basis for accountability. I do not have access to historical AIS information regarding the vessel's movements, as this requires an expensive paid subscription, but our family, along with very many other residents and staff at Hillend have been under no illusion that dredging has been taking place in the bay. The concomitant denuding of the beach's sand is such that anecdotal estimates by those with decades of intimate knowledge of the area place the level at the lowest ever witnessed.

Regarding the influence of winter storms, destruction of shellfish and removal of sand does indeed occur during these events. However, the sand is just as likely to be deposited as removed, depending on the nature of the weather event. Our observations of shellfish casualties and devastatingly low sand levels were made during the spring, summer and autumn of 2020, as and when COVID restrictions permitted access to the beach.

I urge the committee to investigate the issues raised with urgency. If our observations of turbulence and load can be proven to be caused by some other factors, then I apologise for taking up the committee's time, but we remain

convinced in the likelihood that dredging has been taking place in Rhossili Bay and that this has led to the severe reduction of sand and destruction of shellfish habitat as originally stated in the petition.

With kind regards,