

Petitions Committee Site Visit to Burry Port

27 February 2012

The Committee received a petition calling for 'a public inquiry by the Welsh Assembly Government into the sewage pollution of the Burry Inlet and Carmarthen Bay' in 2009. The petition, which was submitted by Rhys Williams and collected 2,240 signatures, resulted from concerns that pollution from combined sewage overflows (CSOs) in Burry Inlet was adversely affecting the cockle population and may be the cause of the premature cockle mortalities there. On 27 February, the Committee visited Burry Port to hear from local people about the problems.

Cllr Bill Thomas addressed the Members, giving detailed information about the problems of pollution and premature cockle mortalities.

Among the points made by Cllr Thomas were that:

- Cockle gatherers do not believe pollution to be solely responsible for cockle deaths, but do believe it to be a contributory factor;
- Since 2005, the mortalities have begun every May;
- The cockles now spawn at eight months rather than two years;
- The testing done in the area, which has concluded that sewage is not responsible for the cockle mortalities, is unreliable as it was done at high tide and at one site only;
- The high incidence of overflows is not effectively recorded by the relevant agencies;
- Significant investment has been made in UV treatment, but it has been suggested that this treatment is not appropriate for the water at Burry Port;
- The pollution will worsen when 16,000 new homes are built under the LDP;
- The export industry and local economy has been hit severely by the cockle mortalities but campaigners are also concerned about the impact of the pollution on the environment;
- An effluent plan for the area is urgently needed

The Chair of the Cockle Association told Members how the problem has affected cockle pickers' livelihoods, meaning that they now survive on roughly 12 weeks' work a year.

Members stated that the following actions are available to them:

- Individual Members are able to raise the issue during Plenary business
- As Members of the Environment and Sustainability Committee, William Powell and Russell George could request that that Committee give the matter urgent consideration
- The Petitions Committee can request oral and/or written evidence from relevant bodies and can produce a report on the issue, which would include recommendations to the Welsh Government.

Committee Service

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