



Meeting of stakeholders regarding the application for an offshore seaweed farm, off Combe Martin by Aqua Botanika Ltd. Meeting held at Combe Martin Community Centre at 12 noon on Wednesday 20th December. Copies of the Feasibility Study were distributed prior to the meeting.

Present: Cllr Martin Worth (CMPC) Chairman of the event, Ty Robinson (from Aqua Botanika Ltd) and Andi Wyer (CMPC Clerk)

Also Present: 12 Representatives of (in no particular order): The local Sub-Aqua club, Ilfracombe Town Council, Combe Martin Parish Council, a former Captain of a merchant marine vessel, Combe Martin Water Watch, Combe Martin Sea Swimmers, Combe Martin Clean Beach Group, and some members of the public

Attendees were invited to ask questions.

My notes may summarise (the question and) the answer.

- Aqua Botanika Ltd is a new company and is small, with its very first crop currently growing in Torquay. The money needed for decommissioning the scheme would be held in escrow.
- The area identified is / has been used as a commercial vessel anchorage area. The MMO will only issue the licence if they are happy that it won't be hazard to shipping.
- The yellow buoys would be anchored (drilled) into the sea bed. The design engineers will be responsible for ensuring the anchorage works.
- Very strong current flows off North Devon. Design engineers will calculate a suitable design.
- The ropes (forming the farm) will be removed each year, so they will only be in the water for part of the year, and they will be checked each year.
- Sea water quality in the area will be improved by the scheme.
- Current plans include using Ilfracombe harbour to access the site, with the harvest being collected into barges and (probably) being shipped to Avonmouth.
- Company unlikely to keep a boat in North Devon, but to hire one as and when necessary.
- Farm unlikely to impact on N.Devon local fishermen, local seamen or casual boaters.
- Timescale will depend on getting the licence and raising the capital required.
- The possibility of the local community wanting to invest hadn't occurred to them given the significant amounts required, but worth looking into.
- 97% of seaweed used in this country is imported from China.
- The farm would be positioned 1.5 miles offshore, so wouldn't impact on the visual attractiveness of the coastline.



COMBE MARTIN

P A R I S H C O U N C I L

- Kayaks would be welcome to paddle around the farm, but it wouldn't be very interesting as everything happens 2m below the surface.
- Coastal Cruise vessels may have to negotiate around the farm.
- N.Devon coastline was suggested as being particularly suitable for this sort of enterprise.
- The Company didn't have a social media presence, so this is one avenue of consulting and raising awareness that they had not utilised.
- The application was first taken to the MMO in May. Having a meeting with the stakeholders was something they probably should have done sooner. Advert in the local paper only just going in so people would be welcome to comment for some time yet.
- On land, this sort of development would have included S106 donation but there would be no impact on the local infrastructure so that was not applicable here.
- Storms unlikely to dislodge any of the seaweed from the farm (2m under the surface) and even less likely to get washed up onto Combe Martin beach (1.5 miles offshore). Would assist if their weed did get washed up onto the beach. More likely to lose a buoy to storm damage (fitted with trackers) than to lose their harvest.
- The farm has no need for fertilisers or herbicides.
- The RSPCA at West Hatch had confirmed that the farm would have no implications for the seal releases on Combe Martin beach. There is nothing likely to trap or injure seals on the farm, but it may spark their interest for a while.
- Once the seaweed has been harvested (April/May), the rope would be brought in. The rope would then be seeded with the next years crop and put out again around August.
- Combe Martin Primary School may be interested in this alternative form of agriculture happening on their doorstep.

Most of the people present seemed satisfied by the responses given and there was a feeling that the people of Combe Martin would like to get involved. Ideally this could be through employment (seeding the ropes, maintenance visits to the farm, etc) but there was an understanding that these would be very limited opportunities. The company promised to keep Andi (CMPC Clerk) updated with news.