

RCA meeting 24th March 2024

Meeting called to discuss the recent visit from MOWI, concerning their proposed fish farm expansion.

Present – Lesley Watt (chair), Sareth Brown (sec), Nick Murphy (treas), Lauren Murphy, Neil Boyd, Hywel Lewis, Alison Morris, Sean Morris, Buffy Cracknell, Alex Mumford, William Stephen, Fliss Fraser

Apologies – Ian Bolas, Kate Bolas, David Mackenzie, Benjamin Lalande.

Discussion points -

1. Question for the IRCT from a member via email, how would money from MOWI help to speed up any current projects on island, and if not coming from MOWI, where does that money come from?
FF said finding money is the first step of any project, looking for grants etc, so the IRCT are used to finding the monies themselves in this way. While it may be easier to do something with a contribution from MOWI, a project won't fail due to a lack of funding from them.
NB pointed out that with the large governments cuts there is likely to be less money available through other funding streams, and that we should be taking advantage of anything being offered.
LM said the current annual payment (around £26.5K including rental payments) from MOWI is very small compared to what they actually make from the farm.

However, the annual payment from MOWI can't be altered, they make the same payments to all communities near their farms.

There could be the possibility of another extra annual payment if this is seen as an additional farm, rather than just an expansion. MOWI has already given a £50K lump sum towards housing and the amenity block. Is there a possibility of annual payments towards the roads or other infrastructure?

2. Some discussion around the credibility or reputation of Rum if we decide to go ahead. FF said we could maybe ask other local communities such as Eigg for their opinion on it. SB said out that we don't, or shouldn't judge Colonsay etc for making a decision for their own community.
3. BC said she had some concern over the effect this may have on Calmac times. When the initial farm had their feasibility study done, Calmac stated it would not have an effect on their timetables, however after a few years they said it was having an effect, and has added extra time to the journey between Rum and Canna – this means that people cannot always connect with public transport on the mainland.
This needs to be a consideration again, being aware that Calmac may go against what they say in a feasibility study.

4. Question via email from a member – regarding whether any housing had been offered to MOWI staff. LW said that this situation hasn't actually arisen yet. FF said there's no issue with offering MOWI staff housing in the future if we have houses become available
It is likely that MOWI will build/need tied housing, and that is something we can't get away from, an ideal would be a couple of family sized houses for staff (along with a hostel type building like their current setup), and a couple of family sized houses for IRCT to rent out.
5. Question from member via email – regarding fishing and the community doing their own monitoring. FF said that the Fisheries Trust have been monitoring and doing surveys since 2018, we could get information from them on what to look for on fish. This can be passed onto locals and visitors.
6. Questions via email – regarding independent surveys that MOWI produce not necessarily being good enough. SM said the Fish Health Inspectorate is a good place to look re fish health and mortality rates of all farms, including the Rum one.
7. General discussion. LW asked what are acceptable levels, what limits are there in both directions? We need a list of questions to present to MOWI before moving forward.
FF said there is a political consideration, how we stand as part of the Small Isles, and how we stand with large multinational companies like this – does this align with our general ethics. We have achieved a lot, where do we see the community headed? HL said he felt the MOWI meeting was slightly disingenuous.
NB said out that it was forestry and tree planting in the past that had a large effect on fish, fertilizers being washed into the sea etc.
NM said we could ask MOWI how they could reduce their impact on the environment, how they could mitigate any damage done. What more can they be doing to help the local environment?

Action points –

Paper to be put up in hall to collect questions from both locals and visitors. From this we can pull a pros/cons list, and a build a SWOT analysis. Points welcome via email to rumcommunityassociation@gmail.com as well if you're not able to make it to the hall.

Possibility of asking other communities (Eigg, Colonsay etc) about their opinions and reasons for choosing how they did.

Open until the end of April possibly, and then we can have another community discussion and hopefully reach a decision (maybe even without a vote?)

Also to collect thoughts on what locals would like to see from MOWI in terms of monetary payments etc – regardless of whether you would vote yes/no, it would be helpful to know what projects could possibly benefit.

