

Plan to eliminate invasive sea creature on Anglesey

Owen R Hughes, DPW West, Nov 4, 2011

AN INVASIVE sea creature will be exterminated at a marina in a £250,000 project to stop them spreading to lucrative mussel beds in the Menai Strait.

Colonies of dangerous Japanese sea squirts pose a threat to mussel and scallop beds by smothering the seabed, and have been carried into Holyhead marina by boats from Ireland.

One mussel fisherman said if the “number one nasty invasive species” reached the Menai Strait, the consequences would be “disastrous”.

Previous attempts to eliminate the carpet sea squirts have failed so the Countryside Council for Wales will splash a quarter of a million pounds on a huge bid to remove the invasive species.

Plastic bags will be used to coat the underwater structures of the marina and smother the creatures, marina bosses say.

Money will also be used to build a quarantine berth in Holyhead harbour so vessels coming from affected areas can be isolated and treated.

The cash is part of £1m from the Welsh Government’s Ecosystem Resilience, Diversity and Compliance Fund.

Other funded projects include, £100,000 for the RSPB to improve and deliver sustainable management of sites across Anglesey to support bird species such as the chough.

There is also £60,000 for British Waterways to enhance nature reserves, protect aquatic plants and improve visitor access on the Montgomeryshire canal.

Ed Hughes, from Holyhead Marina, said: “The invasive sea squirts cause no harm to boats or the marina but the greatest fear is them spreading to the Menai Strait where they could devastate the mussel industry.

“Once they reach the Strait the game is up, so they are hoping to kill it off here before it gets a chance to spread.

“They have attempted to tackle them before at the marina in a piecemeal fashion but this was not successful, now they will go for two big hits to eliminate them. We are also building a quarantine berth to ensure any boat arriving at the marina where there is any risk they could be carrying a sea squirt can be isolated and treated without affecting the rest of the marina.”

Mussel fisherman James Wilson said: “The consequences of the sea squirt reaching the Strait would be disastrous. This would not just be for the mussel industry but other natural habitats like the mud flats. The sea squirts attach to any hard surface and smother that area.

“It is a big concern for the mussel industry and we welcome the Welsh Government’s attempts to tackle the problem.”

Announcing the grants, John Griffiths, Minister for Environment and Sustainable Development, said: “The projects have been chosen because they offer benefits to the people, economy and wildlife of Wales. These projects from across Wales embody the approach we want to take under the new Natural Environment Framework we are developing.”

Projects are expected to complete within this financial year. The carpet sea squirt originally came from Japan but has since spread to ports around the globe.

The projects were assessed by the Chairs of the Wales Biodiversity Partnership’s Ecosystem Expert Groups. This has ensured that funding was allocated to projects covering a wide a spectrum of habitats, species and sites. Over £22 million of project proposals were received against this £1 million fund.

Daily Post North Wales