

Social licensing at seaweed farm sites

Suzi Billing, Paul Tett, Julie Rostan



[e: suzi.billing@sams.ac.uk](mailto:suzi.billing@sams.ac.uk)



Content

- What is social license to operate?
- Components of social license to operate
- Why does social license matter for aquaculture?
- What do site-scale stakeholders think of seaweed cultivation?
- Legitimacy, trust, and consent
- Is social license to operate relevant for seaweed cultivation in the EU?



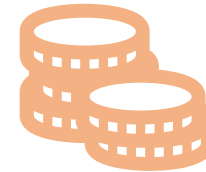
What is social license to operate?



Industry-coined term used to describe the relationships that industries have with communities.



Can empower communities to seek benefits from industries that have social and environmental costs



These costs can include the use of space, environmental and visual degradation, and disruptions to normal social life



Provides a framework for industries to go beyond legal compliance with environmental and social regulations

Components of social license to operate

- ✓ Understanding the social context of the area
- ✓ Trust and trust worthiness
- ✓ Quality contact and engagement
- ✓ Communication
- ✓ Procedural fairness
- ✓ Relationship-building
- ✓ Visual and environmental impact
- ✓ Maintaining social order



change.org Start a petition Browse Subscription Q Log in

Do not allow mechanical kelp dredging in Scottish Waters.



25,293 have signed. Let's get to 35,000!



Wan Rozaman Awang signed 11 hours ago

Tania Smith signed 13 hours ago

[Stop Mechanical Kelp Dredging](#) started this petition to [Scottish Cabinet Secretary for the Environment Roseanne Cunningham](#)

Kelp dredging is currently **not allowed** in Scotland. A company called Marine Biopolymers seek to change that, and have submitted a scoping report to Marine Scotland with a view to gaining permission to dredge over a large area of Scotland's West Coast where they say there could be a 'Significant' Kelp dredge industry.

The importance of our wild kelp beds cannot be overstated.

Example of a grass-roots campaign against an extractive industry; kelp dredging. Source: Change.org 2019



Why does social license matter for aquaculture?



Protest against 250ha seaweed farm Trénez, Nantes, 2015.

Lack of social license can result in:

- Increasing costs of operations
 - Planning and permitting can take longer
 - Risk of sabotage
 - Risk of litigation
 - Damage to reputation
- Decrease in access to sea space
- Increase in formal regulation
- Can cause and unpleasant work/ living environment for those involved

Does social license apply to seaweed cultivation?



Task 6.4.1 Work with local communities at test sites to identify means for achieving social license for development of seaweed aquaculture

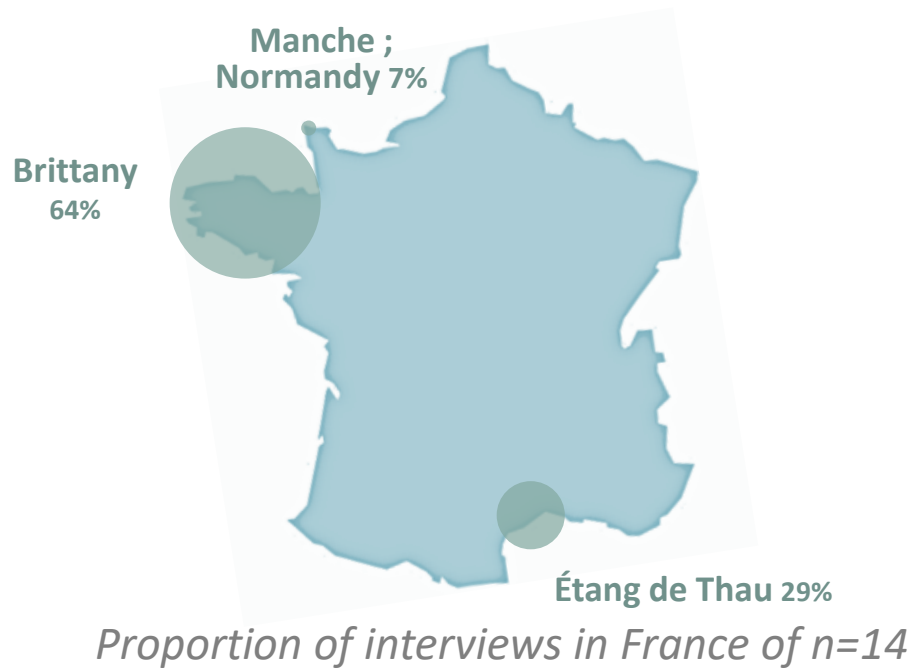


This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Framework Programme under grant agreement No 727892. This output reflects the views of the author, and the Research Executive Agency (REA) cannot be held responsible for any use which might be made of the information contained therein.



www.genialproject.eu

What do stakeholders think of seaweed cultivation in France?



“Until recently there were not too many problems with social acceptability because we cultivated on smaller spaces... 3-4 hectares is fine but 100-150 is impossible.”

- Small scale is acceptable, in all three areas to all stakeholders.
- Large-scale is less acceptable to community groups and NGOs
- Social and environmental concerns
- Perceptions of bias in science and regulation – lack of trust in licensing procedures
- Blue Growth Agenda may not “fit” with community aims.

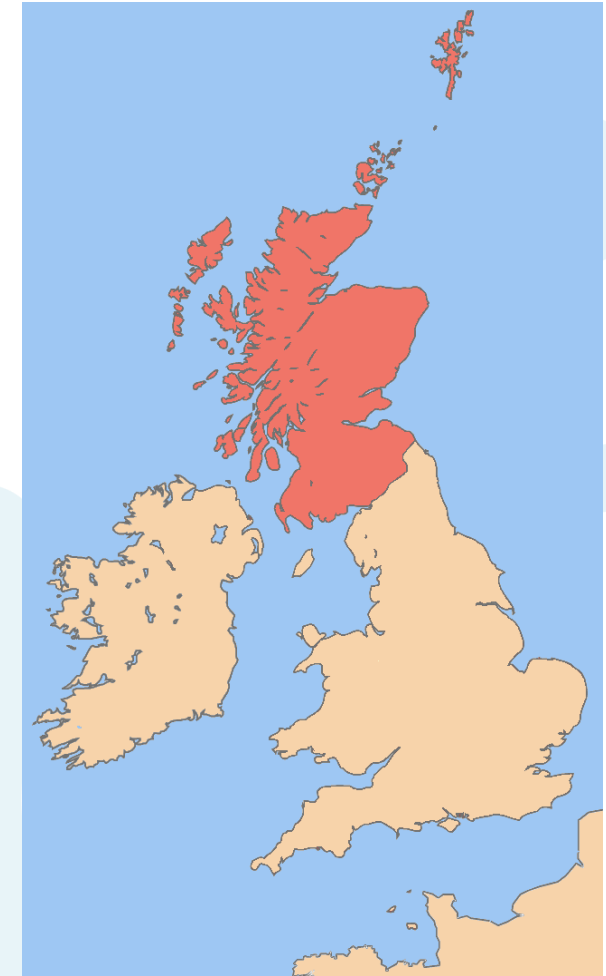


What do stakeholders think of seaweed cultivation in Scotland?



- Desire for locally-owned and run farms and facilities
- Lack of information on what seaweed cultivation could mean for Scotland
- Regulatory regime needs development
- Social and environmental sustainability prerequisites for acceptance

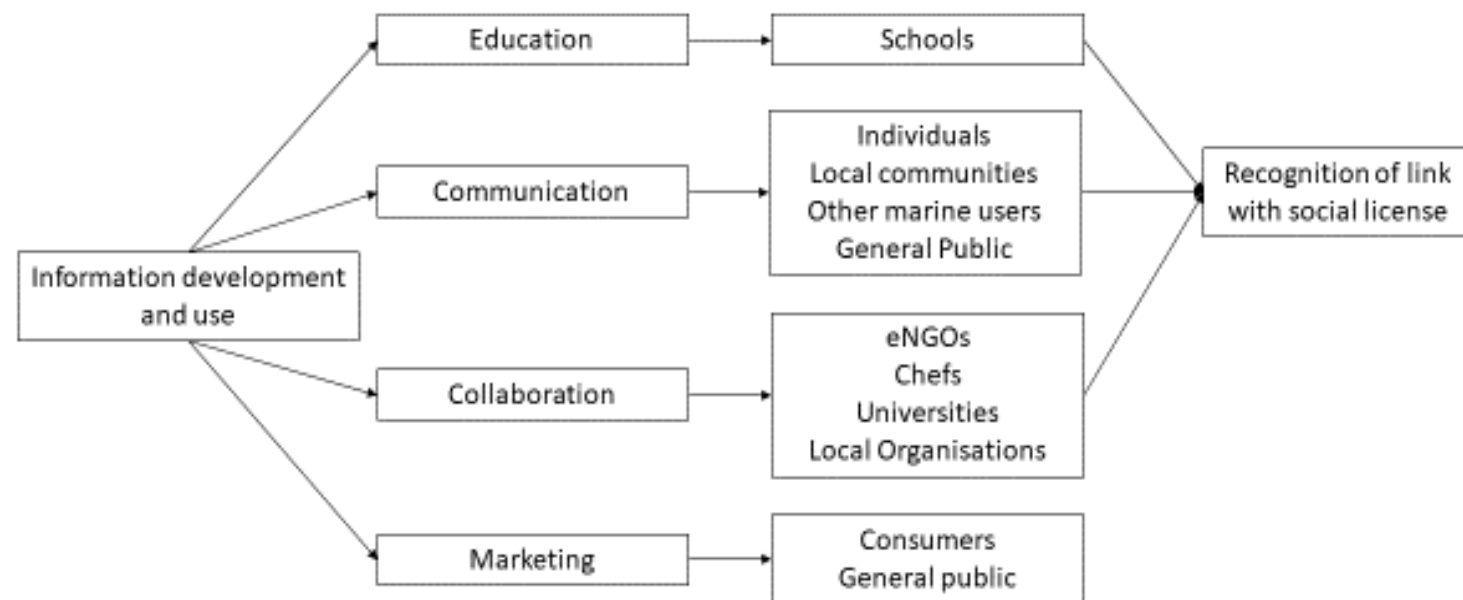
"I need reassurance that seaweed farming is not harmful to the marine environment"



Producer opinions and actions on social license for seaweed cultivation

- ✓ Representation from large to small cultivation organisations, both commercial and experimental
- ✓ All recognise the importance of aspects of SLO, and most were practicing but most had not heard of the term itself

“creating awareness...about seaweed farming avoids misinformation which can be harmful to the sector”



From left to right: the type of information that seaweed cultivation companies have developed, the purpose of its use, the target audience, and self-reported recognition of links with social license theory.

Legitimacy, trust and consent in developing relationships with stakeholders



- ✓ *Legitimacy*: balancing the economic viability of the industry with perceptions of what constitutes a socially acceptable and environmentally sustainable industry.
 - ✓ Scotland: a diffused model
 - ✓ France: small-scale with improved information provision
- ✓ *Trust*: the people/ organisations providing information and engaging with stakeholders can be more important than the information itself
 - ✓ Deliberative knowledge production
 - ✓ Media plays a significant role where relationships are poor
- ✓ *Consent*: difficulty of raising concerns with large corporations/businesses
 - ✓ Accountability and scale
 - ✓ Effective communication

"I don't say that we are "all good" and that they are "all wrong". We must link and gather points of view that are far apart. We are in a logic of co-construction, sharing of decisions and uses, but for this to work, it is necessary that people admit that we can share and therefore [have] discussions."



Is social license relevant for seaweed aquaculture in the EU?



- ✓ *Social license to operate could be useful to the seaweed cultivation industry as it expands – Smaller-sale seaweed cultivation organisations are already practicing activities that are associated with gaining social license to operate*
- ✓ *Clearly define seaweed industry terms – to alleviate confusion in understanding between harvesting and cultivation*
- ✓ *Provide transparent information on environmental impacts – the good and the bad*
- ✓ *Be aware of ad hominem arguments – contextual understanding, situational awareness and empathy are key to reducing the impacts of these types of these types of arguments*
- ✓ *Develop good relationships – coming to a shared consensus is not always feasible, being available to listen, showing empathy and communicating well can reduce conflict*



Huge thank you to all of the people who took part in this study. It would not have been possible without your expertise, opinions and time.

Free resources (including more details on this study): Handbook on Best Practices for Seaweed Cultivation – coming in 2021 – see www.genialgproject.eu for updates

Paper pre-print available: Billing et al (2020) Is social license to operate relevant for seaweed cultivation in Europe? *Aquaculture*, send me an email or a message on ResearchGate (Suzannah-Lynn Billing). Tell us what you think!

Contact Details:
e: Suzi.billing@sams.ac.uk



Find out more
www.genialgproject.eu

Follow Us
 @GENIALG_EU
 @GENIALGproject

Contact us
news@genialgproject.eu



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Framework Programme under grant agreement No 727892. This output reflects the views of the author, and the Research Executive Agency (REA) cannot be held responsible for any use which might be made of the information contained therein.