

Ministear airson Slàinte Poblach

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Duncan McNeil MSP

Convenor

Health and Sport Committee

The Scottish Parliament

Edinburgh

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Ur faidhle/Your ref:

Ar faidhle/Our ref:

16 April 2013

Dear Duncan,

This letter is to update the Health & Sport Committee on the issue of radioactive particles and seafood at Dalgety Bay in Fife; as requested when it approved the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Dalgety Bay) (Scotland) Order 2012 (SSI 2012 No. 135) on 22 May 2012.

Background

Radium (Ra-226) contaminated items have been detected at Dalgety Bay since 1990 and are believed to have arisen from material dumped in the coastal area when the former Donibristle military airbase was in operation. Monitoring by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) in 2011 revealed more radioactive particles and some highly active particles; possibly as a result of coastal erosion exposing previously hidden deposits of radium contamination.

Ra-226 and its 'daughters' (radioactive breakdown products) emit alpha radiation which can increase the risk of cancer and COMARE (the Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment) have indicated that action should be taken to reduce the risk to the public at Dalgety Bay. Some of the particles are small and some can easily break apart so it is possible that they could be ingested by fish & shellfish and subsequently enter the food chain. Additionally some particles have been shown to be soluble in the human gut which increases the dose which could be received.

There is no commercial shellfish industry in the area; however, in the past, individuals have been observed collecting shellfish, possibly for consumption or use as bait. This is despite warning signs indicating that radioactive contamination has been found in the area and seafood should not be collected.

In February last year the Food Standards Agency in Scotland (FSAS), in conjunction with SEPA as part of the joint Scottish radiological monitoring programme, began monthly sampling of shellfish (winkles, mussels & cockles) in Dalgety Bay. Samples were analysed for the presence of radioactive particles.



The FSAS also carried out a screening assessment of the potential food chain dose based on the available data and several results exceeded the 1 millisievert annual allowable dose to members of the public indicating a potential risk.

As a precautionary measure, the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Dalgety Bay) (Scotland) Order 2012 was therefore placed on 9th May 2012 under the Food & Environment Protection Act 1985; making it an offence to remove fish & shellfish from the area. The Order was approved by the Health & Sport Committee on 22 May 2012 and an undertaking given by the FSAS to review the FEPA Order in light of new evidence and/or effective remediation of the contamination.

Current position

The shellfish sampling was reviewed by FSAS in liaison with SEPA in February 2013. As no radioactive particles have been detected over the last year, seafood sampling has now been stopped. This has been replaced by radiation monitoring of the sand and rocks around the mussel beds, which will detect any radioactive particles in the relevant areas and avoid depletion of shellfish populations in Dalgety Bay.

Investigations into the presence and movement of particles in the Dalgety Bay area by MoD contractors and SEPA are continuing and reports are anticipated in the near future. The Dalgety Bay Particles Advisory Group (DBPAG) is due to meet on 18 April 2013 to consider this information and once this is complete the FSA will use relevant data to review its dose risk assessment and the continuing need for the FEPA restrictions.

Results of the shellfish monitoring are available on SEPA's website and the FSAS has kept the public informed of potential food chain implications through periodic articles on its website, most recently on 8 March 2013 on the change from sampling to monitoring of the mussel beds. The FSAS also attends the Dalgety Bay Forum (DBF) and contributes to the Dalgety Bay Particles Advisory Group (DBPAG).

I hope the committee finds this update on the Dalgety Bay issue helpful.

Best wishes



MICHAEL MATHESON