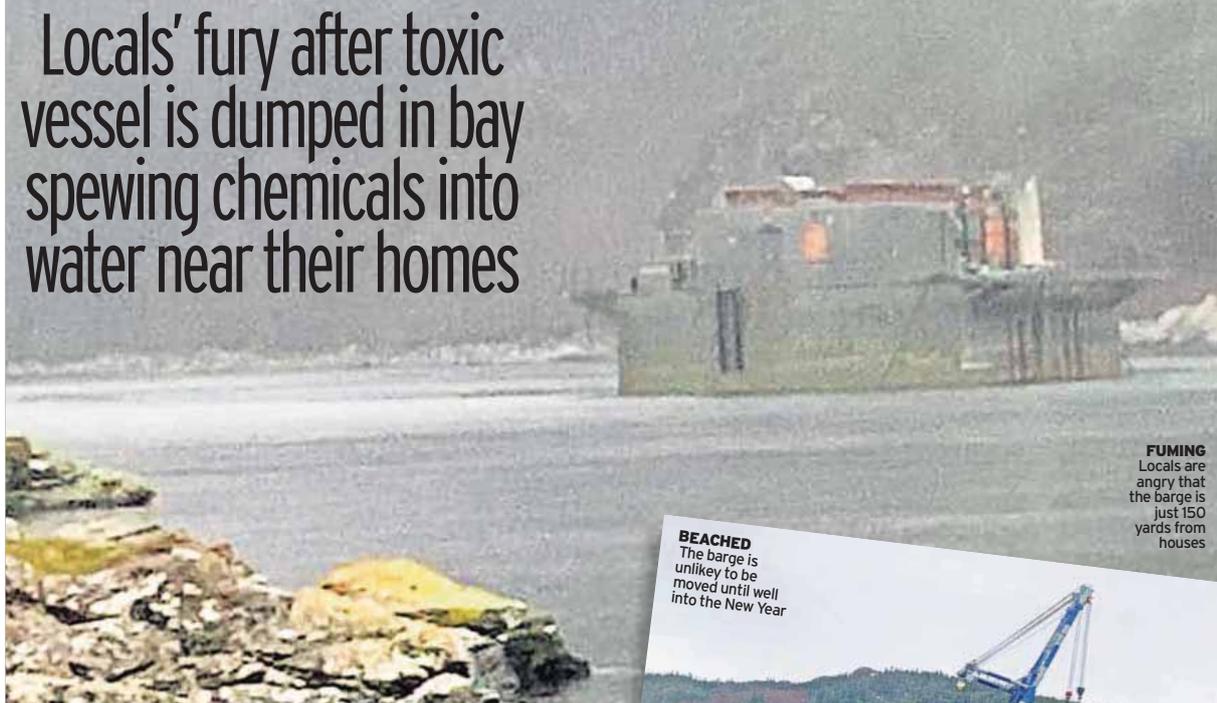


EXCLUSIVE EXPERT WARNS OF 'TIMEBOMB'

ARGY BARGEY

Locals' fury after toxic vessel is dumped in bay spewing chemicals into water near their homes



FUMING
Locals are angry that the barge is just 150 yards from houses

BEACHED
The barge is unlikely to be moved until well into the New Year

A HIGHLAND sealoch is facing a pollution nightmare after a salmon barge sank, spewing chemicals into the water.

The barge "the size of a house" plunged to the bottom of Loch Reraig, near Kishorn in the west Highlands.

The 400-ton fish feed container sank at a farm owned by Faroese firm Bakkafrost in Portree, Skye, during last year's Storm Arwen.

In August, a 500m exclusion zone was placed around the site after "significant levels" of hydrogen sulphide and other "toxic" gases were detected emitting from the vessel.

Locals are now fuming that the wreck has been beached in the middle of Reraig Bay, just 150 yards from houses and on the edge of the Loch Carron marine protected area (MPA),

BY **DAN VEVERS**
Environment Reporter

home to rare flame shell beds. Chris Troup, who stays in one of the houses on the bay, said he was 'appalled'.

Speaking to the Record, he said: "This is a bay where people come to walk their dogs, pick mussels and shellfish and lots of other things. It's a beautiful bay with fantastic wildlife.

"It's like corporate vandalism – they don't give a s**t, they think 'we'll just do it and take the consequences'."

Chris, 78, also revealed he had managed to contact a senior manager at the firm. He said: "I asked him how long it was going to be there and he said it could be 'many weeks' – that was his phrase."

The barge had lain on the seabed at Portree until recently, when it was raised so it could

be emptied of 690 tons of waste water and feed and taken for repair or scrap.

It was towed from Skye and then beached at Reraig after claims that bad weather had made other options too hazardous.

In emails from Highland Council seen by the Record, an official warned locals "there may be a slight rotten egg odour" close by due to the hydrogen sulphide. But they added: "The barge is sealed so levels should be very low and not toxic or hazardous."

However, another local, Prof John Storey, an Aberdeen University chemistry academic, warned the

"explosive" gas is a "toxic timebomb".

In a paper on hydrogen sulphide, he wrote: "The potential for a devastating environmental incident and risk to human health is real."

A spokesman for Bakkafrost Scotland – previously the Scottish Salmon Company – said: "The relevant authorities are being kept informed... on the decommissioning process for the barge and we will work with

the recovery experts to ensure a safe conclusion to the operation."

The Maritime and Coastguard Agency admitted it could be well into the New Year before the barge is removed.

A Scottish Government spokeswoman said: "The area where the barge has settled is outside the Marine Protected Area. The barge does not pose an explosive risk."

