

How does it feel? Reflections on a community's struggle to protect its coastline from marine geoengineering

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By **Senara Wilson Hodges**, *Keep Our Sea Chemical Free* and *The Cornwall Carbon Scrutiny Group*

How does it feel to sink your bare feet into the sparkling ocean?

To stand silently with people who love this bay and have fought to protect it?

To close your eyes and to feel the waves anchoring you to this place and this time?

For me, it feels peaceful and gentle with a shimmer of joy tingling through my cold toes. A series of deep exhalations in time with the waves. I don't think explicitly about the last three years and the tangled path that led us here—but I do feel it.

Feelings are a messy distraction in the warp speed tech-fix world of geoengineering. Companies like Planetary Technologies claim that they are all about hard science and hard business—how could feelings be relevant to the real work of saving the world, one carbon credit at a time?

Businesses are springing up all over the place with a procession of visionary leaders making extravagant claims about how necessary their latest technique is, how integral to the future of humanity and how essential it is to scale up fast. They are on an endless treadmill of keeping the experiments going, making the science fit and wooing companies like Microsoft and Meta as well as tech billionaires like Elon Musk. This is considered existential work so there's a gentleman's agreement (and they are mainly men) to ignore the fact that such investments come from companies whose own emissions are skyrocketing.

Feelings are unscientific and they are left to the little people, the communities where experiments happen with no proper oversight or consent. Often it seems these tech businesses have no concept of what geoengineering might look like or feel like in the real world.

In our case, St. Ives Bay wasn't even mentioned in the initial search for a testing location in 2022—we were just coordinates on a map with a ready made pipeline. South West Water, a privatised water company with a reputation for sewage pollution and paying large dividends to its shareholders, made an opaque deal with Planetary Technologies and the local people paying their water bills were none the wiser.



Photo by Joe and Rob Mc Cleo

The idea that the people who breathed the salty air of St.Ives Bay every day might have *feelings* about the sudden arrival of marine geoengineering wasn't even considered. In fact, Planetary Technologies were completely bemused and seemed quite hurt by the response, "*Prior to St.Ives we've had an incredible amount of very positive press*". The subtext in all our communications was clear—if we only understood what was happening—we would agree to it. But regardless, the tests would happen with or without our consent.

What were our feelings in February 2023 when we found out an ocean alkalinity test had already happened, and more scaled tests were about to start? Shock. Disbelief. Confusion. Anger. Sometimes a rapid shifting through all of them. And this collective response was a result of a deeper set of feelings—our sense of place and the awe and gratitude inspired by the Bay.

When such feelings reverberate through a community, this shared emotional response is a powerful catalyst. At first, Planetary Technologies seemed to have total impunity to do whatever they wanted. And they were making up all the rules. We felt powerless and angry and could easily have stood aside knowing that all the decisions had been made and they'd been made without us. But outrage can evolve into careful and considered action. It can be harnessed to organise, to scrutinise, to question and to reclaim power.

It took two years of dogged campaigning to see off Planetary Technologies who, having hyped their unwavering commitment to the St.Ives experiment, finally slunk away in April 2025. I'm certain that if our community hadn't drawn a line in the sand and demanded answers and oversight, we would be in a very different place. By now, Planetary Technologies would have carried out a series of escalating tests and would be pumping many thousands of tonnes of magnesium hydroxide, imported from mines thousands of kilometres away, into St.Ives Bay via the sewage outfall pipe west of Godrevy Lighthouse.

Yet our community, against all the odds, managed to stop this from happening.

So feelings might be subjective and complex and messy and difficult, but they are also the start of resistance.



Senara Wilson Hodges. Photo by Martin Yelland

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