

## Devon and Severn IFCA News

### Bait digging surveys begin in Tranche 3 MCZs

Survey work is being undertaken to assess levels of bait digging activity in the Tranche 3 MCZs of the Axe, Otter, Dart, Erme, and Devon Avon estuaries.



Erme Estuary MCZ



Blow lugworm cast

Bait digging (the collection of polychaete worms for use as angling bait) is a popular activity across many of the estuaries in D&S IFCA's District. The two main species targeted are blow lugworm, *Arenicola marina*, and king ragworm, *Alitta virens*.

Under its obligations set out in the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 (MaCAA), D&S IFCA must work to further the conservation objectives of [Marine Conservation Zones](#) (MCZs). In May 2019 the Axe, Otter, Dart, Erme and Devon Avon estuaries were all designated as MCZs, with interest features consisting of intertidal sediments and muds. The Dart, Erme and Devon Avon are also home to the tentacled lagoon-worm, *Almaria romijni*, which is also a protected feature. In order to be sure these features receive adequate protection, D&S IFCA is undertaking [survey work](#) to assess the levels of bait digging across these sites, which could potentially impact their sensitive features.



Dart Estuary MCZ

Direct impacts of bait digging include the effect of the removal of worms on the abundance and population structure of the target species, as well as effects on the structure of the wider

benthic community. Indirect effects may relate to trampling surrounding habitats whilst accessing worm beds, or disturbance of bird feeding or roosting behaviour through increased presence on the foreshore.

If management of this activity is deemed necessary to protect the sites' features it could take several forms, including voluntary measures or the introduction of permit conditions under a new byelaw.

### **A New Hand Working Permit Byelaw?**

D&S IFCA is in the process of developing a new Hand Working Permit Byelaw which would manage activities including bait digging, crab tiling, and hand gathering across its District. Updates on the development of this byelaw will be posted on our [website](#).

D&S IFCA has recently consulted with stakeholders on the development of bag limits (catch restrictions) for fishers involved in Hand Working activities that would form part of the overarching Byelaw. This consultation finished on 9th March 2020 and a consultation report has been produced, which can be read [here](#).

D&S IFCA's Byelaw and Permitting Sub-Committee will be discussing how to progress the development of a Hand Working Permit Byelaw this year and further information will be presented at their [meetings](#). Development work will involve further [consultation](#).

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