

Management of Demersal Towed Gear in Torbay MCZ

Devon & Severn IFCA officers have undertaken assessments in order to document and determine whether management measures are required to achieve the conservation objectives of all the Marine Conservation Zones in its district. The IFCA's responsibilities in relation to management of MCZs are laid out in Sections 124 to 126, & 154 to 157 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009.

This report focusses on the conclusions of an assessment, which was undertaken specific to demersal towed gear, trawling and scallop dredging, on the subtidal mud feature of the Torbay MCZ. The subtidal mud feature has a recover to favourable condition objective. For this feature, favourable condition means that, within the MCZ:

1. its extent is stable or increasing
2. its structure and functions, its quality, and the composition of its characteristic biological communities (including diversity and abundance of species forming part or inhabiting the habitat) are sufficient to ensure that its condition remains healthy and does not deteriorate

It is the IFCA's responsibility to seek to further the conservation objectives of the site.

Demersal trawls and scallop dredges are likely to exert the following pressures on the subtidal mud feature:

- Abrasion/disturbance of the substrate on the surface of the seabed
- Changes in suspended solids - water clarity
- Penetration and/or disturbance of the substrate below the surface of the seabed, including abrasion
- Removal of non-target species
- Removal of target species
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A copy of the assessment is attached below along with the formal advice received by NE in response to the MCZ assessment. The assessment considered peer reviewed studies and research, officer knowledge of the site, and fishing activity data to provide evidence of the likely impacts of demersal gear on the subtidal mud feature. The subtidal mud of Torbay is known to be very species rich and four biotopes have been recorded in the site associated with the subtidal mud. D&S IFCA Mobile Fishing Permit Byelaw prohibited towed demersal fishing activities in 53.5% of the subtidal mud in Torbay MCZ. However, this leaves 46.5% unprotected from the impact of demersal fishing gear. Bottom towed gear is known to occur occasionally within areas of subtidal mud which are not protected under the current Byelaw. Some otter trawling takes place in the site and scallop dredging takes place in the areas open to bottom towed gear. The stable nature of the subtidal mud makes it susceptible to disturbance from bottom-towed gear. Previous studies have highlighted that muddy sand habitats have the slowest rate of community restoration following fishing disturbances. From the peer reviewed literature soft sediment habitats, in particular muddy sands, have been found to be vulnerable to bottom towed gear. Predicted recovery times for muddy sand from beam trawls were 236 days; otter trawls 213 days and scallop dredging 589 days. Scallop dredging had a more negative impact on benthic biota than otter trawling, as dredges tend to

penetrate deeper into the sediments than trawls. Additionally, scallop dredges have been found to have the most severe ecological effects

The D&S IFCA MCZ assessment concluded that further management of the demersal towed gear activity taking place on the subtidal mud feature of the MCZ needs to be brought in to protect the subtidal mud feature of Torbay MCZ and ensure that the conservation objectives are furthered. The recommendations for management are:

Dredges: D&S IFCA proposes to prohibit scallop dredging within the Torbay MCZ.

Trawls: D&S IFCA proposed to prohibit demersal trawling within the Torbay MCZ.
D&S IFCA proposes to prohibit pelagic trawling within the Torbay MCZ, where the foot rope comes into contact with the sea bed.

The IFCA officers will undertake an assessment of the economic impact of the removal of all demersal gears from Torbay MCZ and this will help the IFCA understand effective displacement caused by the introduction of these management measures.



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Subtidal Mud.pdf



NE Formal Advice for
Torbay MCZ_towed g

Recommendation:

The Byelaw and Permitting sub-committee consider whether a consultation is undertaken to review the conditions of the Mobile Fishing Permit to introduce further management of the demersal towed gear in Torbay MCZ, as described above. The consultation would aim to gather information on the impact of the management proposals to the fishing industry, as part of an impact assessment.