



## **Mobile Fishing Permit Byelaw**

Torbay MCZ Seagrass Beds and  
Possible Changes to Access for  
Demersal Mobile Fishing Vessels

**3<sup>rd</sup> February 2020**

B&PSC Meeting (11<sup>th</sup> February 2020)

## Possible Changes to Access Area to Protect Seagrass – Torbay MCZ

Seagrass is an important and dynamic habitat which is vulnerable to anthropogenic impacts. Seagrass is a feature of Torbay Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ). The Torbay MCZ co-locates with the Torbay part of the Lyme Bay to Torbay SAC. On 1<sup>st</sup> January 2014, Devon & Severn Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (D&S IFCA) introduced the Mobile Fishing Permit Byelaw to prohibit demersal towed gear from interacting with the sensitive reef habitat in the SAC, and in so doing also afforded protection to the Torbay MCZ seagrass beds, which were designated in 2014, under the Tranche 1 MCZ programme. The conservation objectives for the Torbay MCZ seagrass beds are to recover the presence and spatial distribution of subtidal seagrass beds communities, and to recover the total and spatial distribution of seagrass beds.

The species of seagrass in Torbay is *Zostera marina*. Generally, in the UK *Z.marina* is found in a depth range of 0.5m to 5m when there is limited suspended sediment. In certain areas of clear waters, it can be found up to 10m. Growth only occurs in gently sloping areas and is never present in areas steeper than 5.58°. *Z.marina* requires sheltered environments with very little disturbance from waves and wind (Brown, 2015).

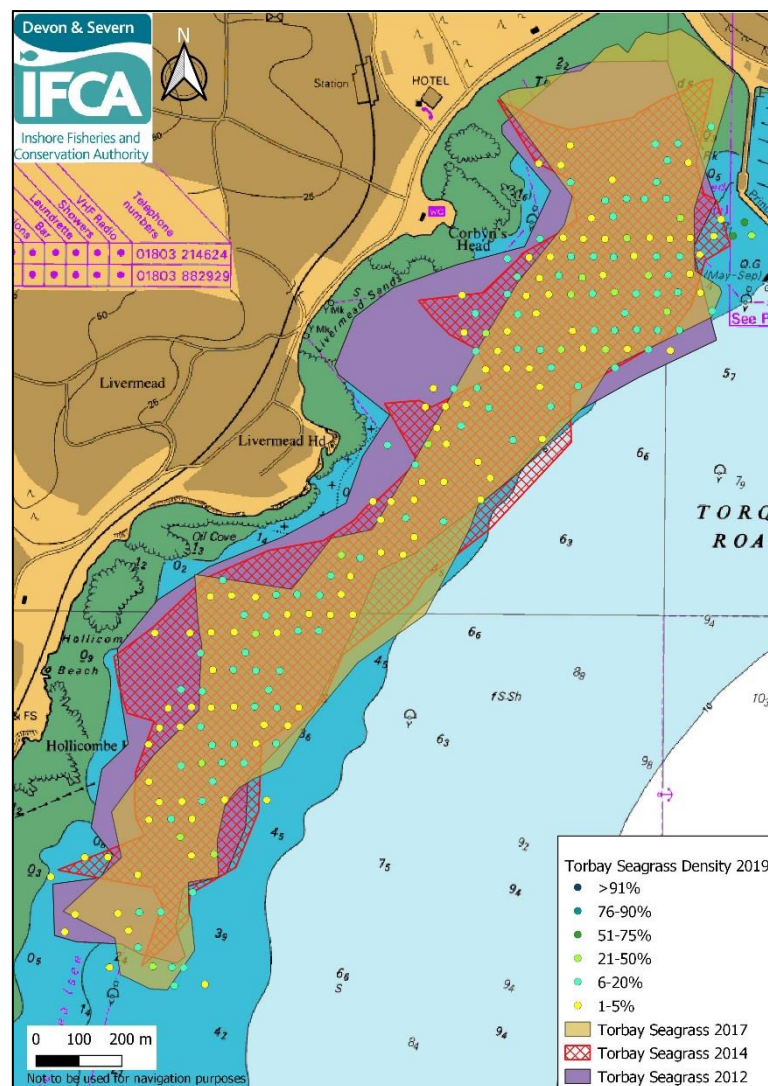


Figure 1 Extent change of Torre Abbey Bed 2012-2019

D&S IFCA has carried out surveys every two years, since 2012, to monitor the extent and density of the beds. The 2019 survey was carried out by the Environment Agency. The survey results demonstrate the dynamic nature of the beds, highlighting changes shape and area each time (Figure 1, Torre Abbey Bed).

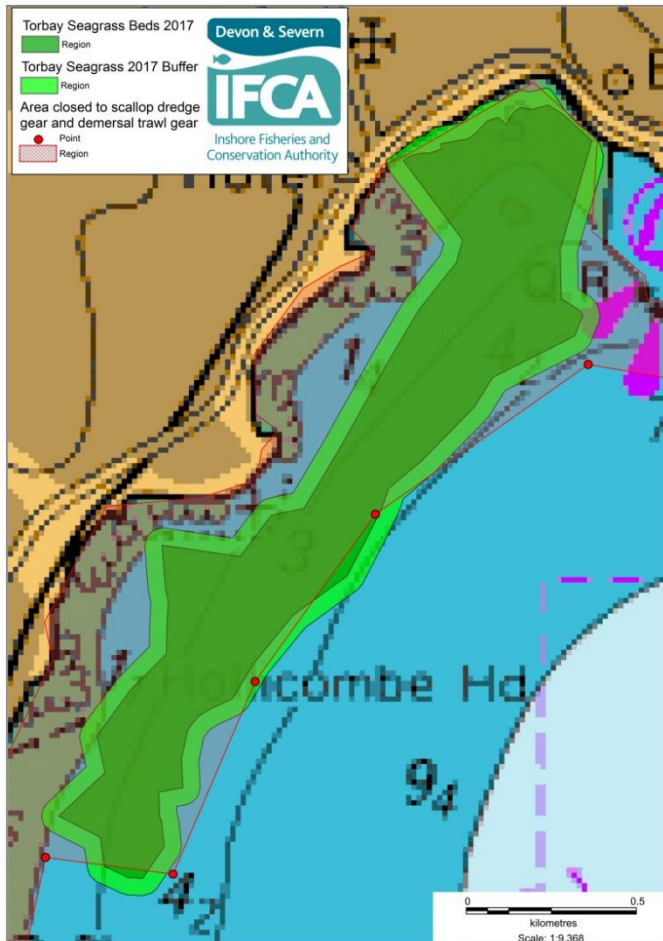


Figure 2 Torre Abbey Seagrass bed with 50m buffer - 2017 Survey

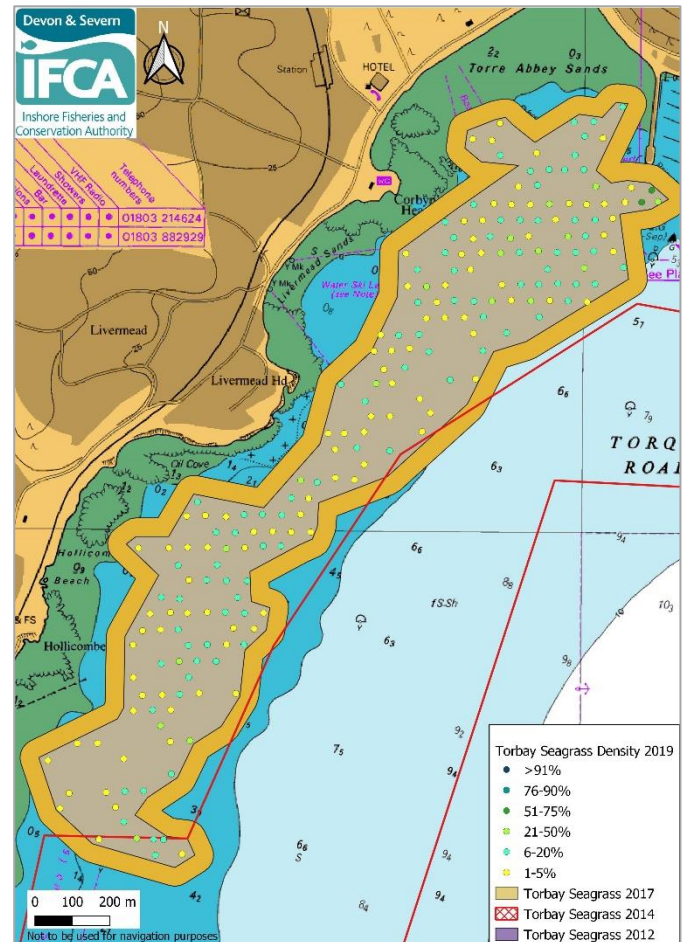


Figure 3 Torre Abbey Seagrass bed with 50m buffer - 2019 Survey

A 50m buffer has been added to the outer extent of the beds to add extra protection to this sensitive habitat from the possible interaction of demersal mobile fishing gear. UK guidance on defining MPA boundaries and setting buffer zones was produced by JNCC in 2012 to support Defra's Revised Approach in the management of fishing activities in Marine Protected Areas. Figures 2 and 3 show the Torre Abbey seagrass beds for 2017 and 2019 with the buffers added. Any management of demersal mobile gear should take into account the extent of the beds and buffer zone. Since the Mobile Fishing Permit Byelaw was introduced in 2014, no changes in permit conditions to manage demersal mobile fishing activity in relation to the seagrass beds have been introduced in the Torbay MCZ. However, management of demersal fishing gear on the sub-tidal mud feature of the MCZ was introduced in 2017. The seagrass bed at Torre Abby has extended outside the closing line into the access area in 2017 and 2019 as shown above, with the density and location of this extension changing between the years. All other beds have been fully protected.

With the importance of seagrass beds, and their dynamic nature, the current access area for the byelaw needs to be reviewed. This review could potentially remove some of the access,



to allow the bed to extend outwards if the environmental conditions allow. The only area this would effect is Torre Abbey; all other beds have room to extend under the current management.

Taking these limiting factors into consideration, a proposed change for the demersal fishing gear access area at Torre Abbey has been mapped based on chart datum, current seagrass beds and exposure of the area. Figure 4 demonstrates this proposed change in blue, with the red line being the current access.

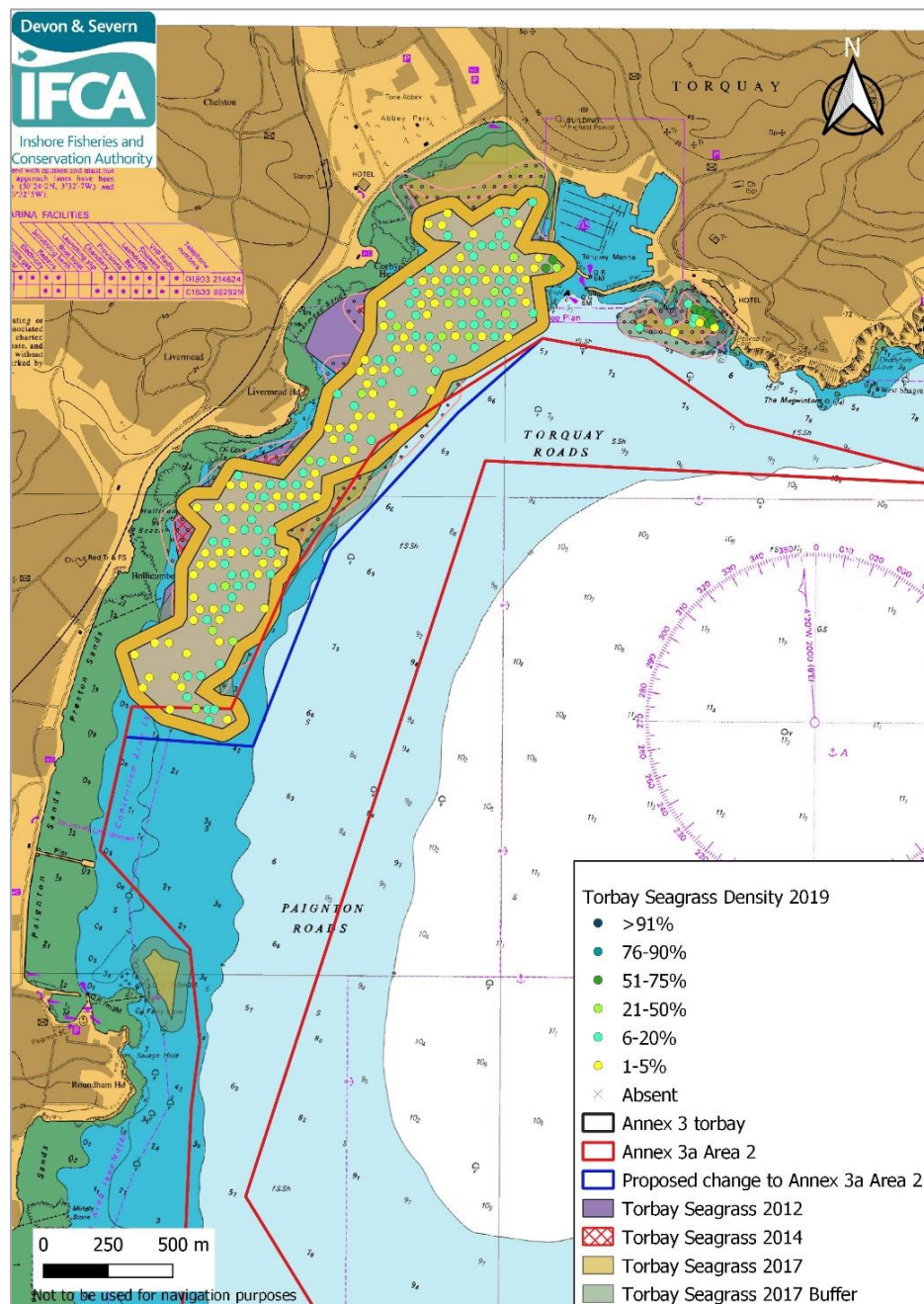


Figure 2 Proposed change to access area, option 1- Torre Abbey

A second option has been mapped (Figure 5) with a larger closed area; this would stop access to towed demersal gear for the full extent of Paignton beach. There have been few records of seagrass in this area, even though the depth is compatible with seagrass beds. The only bed identified, which was present in the 2017 survey only, was a small seagrass bed north of Roundham Head that lies within the current closed area. It is difficult to know if there is the potential for the Torre Abbey bed to spread southwards or a new bed to emerge. There may be other factors that limit the spread of the bed or existence of a permanent bed here. Environmental conditions, such as the direction the coastline faces in this area, which may make this area more susceptible to disturbance during easterly winds.

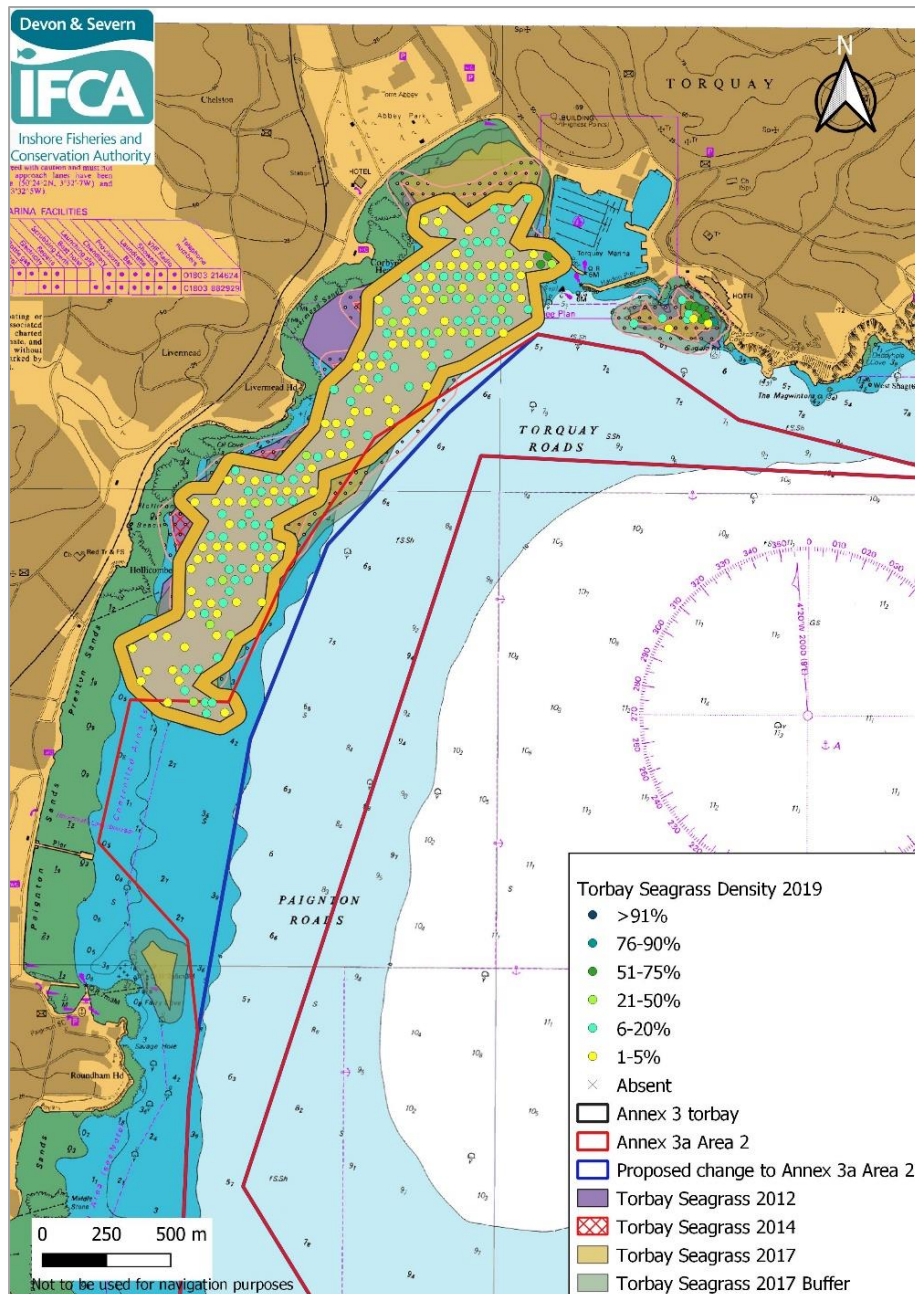


Figure 3 Proposed change to access area, option 2

**Officer's Advice:**

*B&PSC considers changing the access area for demersal Mobile Gear under the Mobile Fishing Permit Byelaw permit conditions to protect the seagrass beds in the Torbay MCZ.*

*There are two options to consider:*

- 1. Changing the access area under Option 1 (Figure 4)*
- 2. Changing the access area under Option 2 (Figure 5)*