



**D&S IFCA's Additional
Response to Marine Licence
Application for a seaweed farm in
Torbay
MLA/2022/00183
January 2023**

Devon and Severn Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (D&S IFCA) is a statutory consultee for Marine Licences submitted to the Marine Management organisation (MMO). D&S IFCA is making an additional response to MLA/2022/0183 following Biome's response to the additional consultation.

D&S IFCA statutory duties are to :

- (a) seek to ensure that the exploitation of sea fisheries resources is carried out in a sustainable way,
- (b) seek to balance the social and economic benefits of exploiting the sea fisheries resources of the District with the need to protect the marine environment from, or promote its recovery from, the effects of such exploitation,
- (c) take any other steps which in the authority's opinion are necessary or expedient for the purpose of making a contribution to the achievement of sustainable development, and
- (d) seek to balance the different needs of persons engaged in the exploitation of sea fisheries resources in the District.

D&S IFCA is supportive of mariculture developments as it fulfils its statutory duties in particular those of sustainable development, but D&S IFCA must also be mindful of the need to seek to balance the needs of all persons engaged in the exploitation of sea fisheries resources and consider the existing use of the location of any proposed development.

D&S IFCA has considered the Biome response to D&S IFCA's report of 24th November 2022 and the response from the fishing industry. D&S IFCA has tried to find the full responses from the fishing industry on the MMO Marine Case Management System for the MLA/2022/00183 but was not able to locate them. Within the Biome response it states that there are three representations from the industry, but it must be noted that one of them is from the Western Fish Producers Organisation representing 25 fishing vessels based at Brixham. D&S IFCA appreciates the further consultation by Biome, and it would appear that this additional consultation has reached far more of the fishing industry than previous consultations/engagement attempts.

D&S IFCA has provided clear information to the applicant on the level of fishing within/across the site. The applicant has questioned the IVMS data but has accepted it as 'proxy data'. D&S IFCA would point out that it uses such data in the monitoring and compliance of its management measures, in particular using the speed of 2-4knots as indicative of fishing, and these are the best data available on fishing activity in the area. It should also be pointed out that the MMO and Cefas use 0-6knots as indicative of fishing and if this were the case the level of fishing in the areas of the proposed seaweed farm would be much greater – 72 vessels rather than 21 as shown in D&S IFCA's response of 24th November 2022. D&S IFCA still has concerns regarding the impact to the fishing industry of the proposed location of the seaweed farm. The response by Biome has not mitigated these concerns.

D&S IFCA has the largest mobile gear fleet of all IFCA's and has 22 Marine Protected areas most of which have prohibition of demersal fishing gear within all or large parts of the sites. The waters around Torbay are undoubtedly very busy as has been demonstrated by the applicant from the AIS data and the NCI data. AIS is only required by law on vessels over 15m in length. D&S IFCA has a maximum overall size limit for fishing vessels of 15.24m. Most inshore fishing vessels operating in the D&S IFCA's District are much smaller than this and do not have AIS. Therefore, the AIS data will not show the level of fishing activity in the area of the farm. The IVMS data, provided in D&S IFCA's response, do indicate the level of demersal fishing in the area. The NCI data clearly shows that commercial activity in the Bay is highest in between January and May. Therefore, these activities will be influenced by the

location of the farm. Biome has noted that a large proportion of D&S IFCA's District along the South Coast is prohibited to mobile fishing gear (trawling and scalloping). D&S IFCA has the largest mobile gear fleet operating in its district (mostly in South Devon) compared to other IFCAs. This means that those areas open to demersal fishing are very busy areas indeed, and further spatial restrictions will lead to displacement of activity. There are other IFCA Districts that have much less mobile fishing – such as Southern IFCA and Cornwall IFCA, and those further east and north. The fishing industry is currently under increased pressure from marine developments including wind farms and cabling, mariculture, HPMA and MPAs, and this has been highlighted nationally through the NFFO Spatial Squeeze report (APB Mer, 2022).

D&S IFCA is fully aware of its duties and Defra's high-level objectives, and supports sustainable mariculture developments, but it must also consider the existing use of areas within its District and seek to balance the need of different persons engaged in the exploitation of sea fisheries resources. D&S IFCA has supported research projects within mariculture sites within its District and habitat restoration and natural capital/marine biodiversity projects. Tor Bay already has two areas where marine licences for seaweed farms have been granted, one scallop ranch, and one rope grown shellfish farm, which is a fairly significant level of mariculture development compared to many other areas along the English coast. The Torbay Harbour Master objected to the current marine licence applications within its jurisdiction. D&S IFCA appreciated that the applicant therefore moved the site just outside the harbour limits, but the same issues still apply here. The Harbour Master, in recent communications, is still not supportive of the farm where it is proposed and is concerned about the effect on the large vessels coming into anchor in Tor Bay. Due to this current level of mariculture in the Bay and concerns of the Harbour Master, D&S IFCA will not be looking at Tor Bay as a potential Mariculture Park. The cultural heritage of the fishing industry within Torbay is very important – Brixham, as the largest fishing port in the country, and the smaller fishing ports of Paignton and Torquay are all part of the area's heritage and socio-economics, with many industries and tourism dependent on the fishing industry.

D&S IFCA would happily work with the applicant to find a location that would avoid the impacts to the fishing industry that have been highlighted in its responses. D&S IFCA has previously worked with the applicant, Algapelago and the fishing industry in North Devon to find a suitable site for a seaweed farm in Bideford Bay. D&S IFCA appreciates that the applicant has scientific and academic support for a seaweed farm. Perhaps the applicant might consider a site within the Plymouth Sound and Estuaries SAC, potentially south of the breakwater that might be suitable for the development and be close to the scientific and academic institutions interested in working with the applicant (University of Plymouth, Marine Biological Association) along with being within the Plymouth Sound National Marine Park.