

Date: 30 May 2025  
Our ref: 514185  
Your ref: TOR\_MCZ\_005 Static pots traps vs. Seagrass 2025 v4



Dr James Stewart  
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**BY EMAIL ONLY**

Dear James,

**Formal Advice to Devon and Severn IFCA: Marine Conservation Zone Assessments – Static pots and traps on seagrass v4, Torbay MCZ.**

Natural England is a non-departmental public body. Our statutory purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

In 2012, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) announced a revised approach to the management of commercial fisheries in European Marine Sites (EMS). The revised approach was subsequently extended to ensure fishing activities in Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) are managed in accordance with the provisions of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009.

Assessment has been made of the effects of the following fisheries activities in Torbay MCZ:

- Cuttle potting on seagrass beds and Long-snouted seahorse (*Hippocampus guttulatus*) (TOR\_MCZ\_005 Static pots traps vs. Seagrass 2025 v4)

Natural England has considered the document prepared by Devon and Severn IFCA for the purposes of making an assessment consistent with the provisions of the Marine and Coastal Access Act, 2009. Please accept this letter as Natural England's formal advice on the assessment and the conclusions it makes.

We are content that the best available and most up-to-date evidence has been used to carry out the assessment by D&S IFCA officers, to determine whether management of this activity is required to protect site features, and thus to ensure the protection of the features from direct and indirect impacts from the collection of marine fisheries resources.

It is Natural England's view that through this assessment, D&S IFCA officers appear to have appropriately identified those activities that are likely to have a significant effect in view of the site's conservation objectives, and whether management measures are required in order to ensure that the assessed fishing activities are not likely to hinder the conservation objectives of the features of the MCZ.

**Natural England agrees that it cannot be concluded that, at current levels, the cuttle potting activity is not having an adverse effect on the seagrass bed and Long-snouted seahorse (*Hippocampus guttulatus*) of the Torbay MCZ; and therefore this activity has the potential to hinder the achievement of the conservation objectives.**

**We therefore support the proposal that management measures need to be implemented to ensure the conservation objections of the site are furthered.**

We also welcome the further data collection proposed under the Monitoring and Control Plan, developed from the conclusions of Version 3 of the assessment. As reported in the assessment, due to low turnout at in-person meetings and a limited response rate to the cuttle potting questionnaire, uncertainty remains regarding the actual level of activity overlapping with the feature. In this context, it will be necessary to make use of iVMS data as it becomes available, to further quantify both the intensity and spatial distribution of potting activity in relation to seagrass beds. This information will be critical to inform the ongoing adaptive risk review process.

In addition, uncertainty still remains regarding the potential impact of individual pots or strings of pots on seagrass. Although the Parkhouse (2021) study showed no visible disturbance during a 30-minute soak time, it is noted in the assessment that pots are often left for 1–7 days, according to local potters. Even in cases where the gear is static and the seagrass remains rooted, placement of pots whether single or in strings can cause bruising to seagrass leaves, which may affect plant health and resilience over time.

Finally, we would like to flag an editorial correction: In Summary Table 12 (page 17) under Long-snouted seahorse - Supporting habitats: extent & distribution, the target should read 'recover', rather than 'maintain'.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require further information.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jasmine Rix". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jasmine Rix  
Higher Officer - Marine  
Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Area Team