

## Devon and Severn IFCA News

### Developing a Voluntary Code for Potting in Torbay MCZ - Balancing Fisheries and Conservation

**Devon & Severn IFCA is seeking to co-develop a voluntary code of conduct for potting over seagrass beds within the Torbay Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ).**

This initiative aims to safeguard sensitive marine habitats while supporting sustainable inshore fisheries. Fishers potting within the Torbay MCZ are invited to participate in a workshop on Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> November 2025, from 6–8pm in Paignton (Paignton Vista – Paignton Club), to engage with D&S IFCA to shape the voluntary code.

#### Background

Seagrass habitats are ecologically significant, supporting many marine species and contributing to carbon storage, but they face a range of pressures including poor water quality, recreational vessel anchoring and fishing activities in some areas. On 16<sup>th</sup> October 2025, the IFCA's Byelaw & Permitting Sub-Committee (B&PSC) reviewed evidence regarding the potential impacts of cuttlefish potting on seagrass beds which are designated feature of Torbay MCZ.

D&S IFCA is aware that a small number of fishers operating in the MCZ use cuttlefish pots on or in close proximity to areas of seagrass during the fishery season. Scientific assessments indicate that strings of more than two pots can drag across the seabed during hauling, causing abrasion and uprooting of seagrass. In contrast, single pots or pairs tend to lift vertically, reducing the risk of damage.

D&S IFCA has worked with fishers to investigate whether changing gear configuration (pot spacing) could help fishers to reduce pot drag. However, fishers have highlighted that hauling technique, vessel control and environmental conditions, including wind and tide, are more important factors in determining drag of the pots.

Recognising the complexity of the issue, and that effective management must be proportionate and evidence-based, D&S IFCA is proposing a collaborative co-management approach.

#### Collaborative Management Approach

Fishers interviewed to date are aware that seagrass beds are a feature of the Torbay MCZ. They have indicated that they have no intent to cause damage and have provided valuable insights into operational challenges.

Co-development and application of a voluntary code of practice for the cuttle potting fishery appears to be a proportionate approach to protecting the seagrass beds. This voluntary code will include practical steps to minimise interaction with seagrass beds. It will apply to both commercial and recreational potting, but only within clearly defined areas where seagrass is present.



In order for a voluntary code to be effective and achieve the goals of protecting the seagrass beds, as well as allowing a continuation of fishing opportunities, there are certain criteria that

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will need to be included. Working with fishers, to develop the voluntary code, is important to achieve co-management and ensure the success and effectiveness of the code and adherence with it.


## **Monitoring and Adaptive Management**

Whilst voluntary codes can face long-term challenges, D&S IFCA is confident that its improved monitoring capabilities, including drone technology and the national inshore vessel monitoring systems (IVMS), will support its effectiveness. Natural England has highlighted the value of these technologies, noting that IVMS data will help address current information gaps and inform adaptive management.

D&S IFCA hopes that the voluntary code succeeds, and the monitoring of the fishery and adherence with the code will be reported to the B&PSC in 2026. The consequence for non-adherence to voluntary codes is likely to be formal regulation.

## **Invitation to Participate**

D&S IFCA invites all fishers to attend a collaborative meeting; to contribute directly to the development of the voluntary code, share experiences, and help shape a balanced approach to conservation and fisheries management.

 **Date:** Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> November 2025

 **Time:** 6–8pm

 **Location:** Paignton Vista – Paignton Club, 1 Esplanade Road, Paignton, TQ4 6EB

## **Links to Information**

[Marine Conservation Zone Assessment \(TOR-MCZ-005-V4 – April 2025\)](#)

[NE Formal Advice May 2025 on D&S IFCA Torbay MCZ Assessment Static Pots vs Seagrass 2025 V4](#)

[Officers' Report to the B&PSC \(Agenda Item 7\) – 16<sup>th</sup> October 2025](#)