

Update on Co-Developing a Code of Conduct for Fishing with Pots and Traps in the Seagrass areas within the Torbay Marine Conservation Zone

Officers' Recommendations

1. That Members note the development of the Code of Conduct for implementation in Spring 2026, to minimise the impact of fishing with pots and traps on defined areas of seagrass within the Torbay Marine Conservation Zone.
2. That Members note the next steps for Officers to take in
 - (i) working in partnership with fishers to undertake further research, and
 - (ii) monitoring adherence to the Code of Conduct.

Background

In previous meetings of the Byelaw and Permitting Sub-Committee (B&PSC) (26th June 2025 and 16th October 2025) Members considered evidence that has demonstrated the potential impacts of fishing with traps for cuttlefish on protected features of the Torbay Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ), specifically seagrass and the long snouted seahorse (*Hippocampus guttulatus*).

On 16th October 2025, Members agreed to the implementation of a Code of Conduct, to be co-developed between Officers and fishers. Natural England supported this voluntary approach provided it is monitored and reviewed. This paper updates Members on progress made since the October 2025 B&PSC meeting.

Summary of Code Co-Development

Since October 2025, D&S IFCA has worked closely with fishers through a structured process of meetings, follow-up calls, evidence review, and information sharing to co-develop a Code of Conduct for potting in seagrass areas of the Torbay MCZ. This co-development process will be fully documented in a separate report.

Officers held a well-attended meeting in November 2025, followed by detailed one-to-one conversations which clarified fishers' individual fishing practices and thoughts on the Code outside of a group setting. Following specific questions from fishers, Officers also reviewed and shared relevant research and guidance from other IFCAs, and supplied a draft Code for fishers to consider ahead of a further co-development meeting in February 2026.

At the February 2026 meeting, after resolving remaining concerns and refining details collaboratively, fishers confirmed their agreement to the Code of Conduct. This comprehensive engagement provided multiple opportunities for fishers to shape the approach, contribute local knowledge, and agree priorities for future joint research.

Summary of Agreed Code Of Conduct

The Code of Conduct (shown in Annex A) sets out that the Code applies only within mapped subtidal seagrass zones and applies to all pots and traps, with specific commitments on gear configuration. Fine-scale maps of seagrass zones will be provided to Permit holders; an example of these is shown in Annex B.

Within seagrass zones, cuttlefish traps may be set singly, in pairs or in strings of up to three traps, with no end weights to be used. All other pot types may only be used outside of the seagrass zones.

The Code also includes fisher commitments on hauling technique and engagement in research. Officers have also identified important commitments to be made by D&S IFCA. These include carrying out collaborative research with fishers to further develop the evidence base, supporting boat-based research financially, sharing findings promptly, monitoring adherence to the Code, and meeting annually with fishers to review evidence and discuss next steps. Officers will report progress and adherence to the B&PSC, and if monitoring indicates poor adherence or evidence of seagrass damage, there will be an opportunity for Members to consider formal management measures.

Officers' Next Steps

Officers will:

- Develop a robust research plan and begin research work in Spring 2026 to further assess impacts of pots and traps on seagrass; this will be assisted by fishers as per their commitments in the Code of Conduct.
- Develop and implement a plan for efficient monitoring of adherence to the Code of Conduct, including via IVMS, direct observation and intelligence reports submitted by stakeholders.
- Share information on the Code of Conduct with all holders of D&S IFCA Potting Permits with a base port in or near to the ports of Torbay, from Teignmouth to Brixham.
- Publicise the Code of Conduct via D&S IFCA's website.
- Update Members via the B&PSC in September/October 2026, subject to meeting timings.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

Background Papers

B&PSC Papers & Minutes – Section B of D&S IFCA website Resource Library.

[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](#)

[Monitoring and Control Plan – Torbay MCZ – Potting on Seagrass V1 \(August 2023\)](#)

Annex A. Code of Conduct

The Code of Conduct will be published in full-size A4 format, and provided to Permit holders alongside fine-scale charts of each seagrass zone, an example of which is in Annex B.

Code of Conduct

To minimise impacts on seagrass of fishing with pots and traps in Torbay Marine Conservation Zone

Any person using pots and traps in Torbay Marine Conservation Zone is asked to adhere to this Code of Conduct. The Code has been co-developed between D&S IFCA Officers and Commercial Potting Permit holders, and it applies in mapped seagrass zones[†].

In mapped seagrass zones, Potting Permit holders:

- will not use parlours, creels, or inkwell pots.
- may use single cuttlefish traps, pairs or in strings of up to three traps but will not use end weights for their traps.
- will work gear slowly and ensure that all traps are lifted directly upwards to minimise drag along the seabed.

Outside of seagrass zones, pots and traps may be fished in longer strings and with end weights.

Drawn by: D&S IFCA
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<https://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk>

Potting Permit holders will continue to collaborate with D&S IFCA, to improve the evidence base and management approach for interactions between pots, traps and seagrass in Torbay MCZ.

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[†]D&S IFCA will provide fine-scale charts to Permit holders

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Annex B. Example Map: Broadsands to Elberry Cove Seagrass Zone

Fine-scale maps such as this example will be provided to Permit holders to aid adherence to the Code of Conduct. Co-ordinates of all points which define the seagrass zones will also be provided in a suitable format to assist navigation. Zones are based on surveyed areas of seagrass.

