

## Protection of Mariculture Sites

### Officers' Recommendation

**That Members agree to formally consult on prohibiting fishing by demersal mobile fishing gear vessels within the defined area of the mussel seed farms in Labrador Bay, South Devon and Bideford Bay, North Devon as set out in Figure 1 and Figure 2 of this Officers' paper.**

### Background

The Authority supports sustainable development and recognises the benefits of growth in Mariculture in the District. Mariculture sites are at risk from incursions by mobile fishing vessels that can damage the farms and deter further investment into this fishing sector. In recent years there have been reported incursions into mariculture sites which have resulted in significant financial costs to the owners of the established sites. These losses are similar to the financial losses suffered by static gear vessel owners when their pots and nets are towed away by demersal towed gear vessels.

In June 2022, Members of the Byelaw and Permitting Sub-Committee (B&PSC) supported the proposal to prohibit fishing by demersal mobile fishing vessels in three specified coastal mariculture sites in D&S IFCA's District. The decision was in line with D&S IFCA's Mariculture Strategy. The Strategy had set out that established mariculture sites should be protected from the interaction with mobile fishing vessels.

Prohibiting demersal mobile gear vessels from fishing in mariculture sites is a way to reduce the risk of damage to the farms and encourage investment in mariculture. However, the Authority has agreed that management measures for new mariculture sites (prohibiting access to defined sites) should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

### New Mariculture Sites

#### Mussel spat collection site Labrador Bay South Devon - see Figure 1:

Offshore Shellfish Ltd (OSL) was granted a Marine Licence in 2025 to locate a 40-hectare spat collection site within Labrador Bay between Torquay (to the South) and Teignmouth (to the north). D&S IFCA responded to the Marine Licence Application and suggested a slight change in the location and orientation of the site to reduce the impact on the local mobile gear vessels who have historically fished in the area. The MMO considered all the information from the consultation on the Marine Licence Application, including impact on other marine traffic, and granted the licence for the site in the original proposed location.

The site will provide an additional sheltered area to grow seed mussels which will be grown on to market size at the existing offshore sites in Lyme Bay. Currently the main harvesting sites in Lyme Bay are wholly reliant on the seed mussels that settled on the ropes of the offshore site, but like any natural resource there can be variability in the timing, weather, quantity, predation, and survivability of mussel seed. This site once established will help

reduce the risk of the possibility of failure in the supply of mussel seed, which is vital to the continuation of OSL. Mariners, including Fishermen's Associations, have been notified by OSL that it was intended to commence the construction of the site by the end of January 2026.



Figure 1- Mussel Spat Collection Site Labrador Bay South Devon

### Seaweed Farm Bideford Bay North Devon - see Figure 2

Algapelago Marine Ltd (AML) were granted a Marine Licence to locate a seaweed farm in Bideford Bay, North Devon, in 2022. The site is 116 hectares in size and is marked on the most up to date Admiralty Chart. AML worked closely with the local fishermen to locate the farm in an area that would least impact the existing users of the area, and some of the North Devon fishermen continue to help support the operation of the farm. The farm has longlines spaced so that seed can be deployed on the lines and allows for maintenance and harvesting. The farm grows and harvests sugar kelp in the upper reaches of the farm area and also have a dispensation to grow shellfish within the farm site. AML is currently on-growing mussel seed on lines in the midwater area of the farm. They are also considering seeding and growing native oysters on the seabed below the farm. The farm site is described by AML as a 'Blue Forest creating a new, complex habitat for keystone species, accelerating marine restoration, providing refuge, habitat and food to enable marine regeneration'.



Figure 2 Seaweed Farm Bideford Bay North Devon

## Officers' Recommendation

Officers recommend that D&S IFCA formally consults on amending the Category One Mobile Fishing Permit Conditions to prohibit fishing by demersal mobile fishing gear vessels in the specified mariculture sites set out in Figure 1 and Figure 2 of this Officers' paper.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

## Background Papers

Authority Papers and meeting minutes ([Section B of D&S IFCA Website Resource Library](#))  
[D&S IFCA's Mariculture Strategy \(March 2021\)](#)