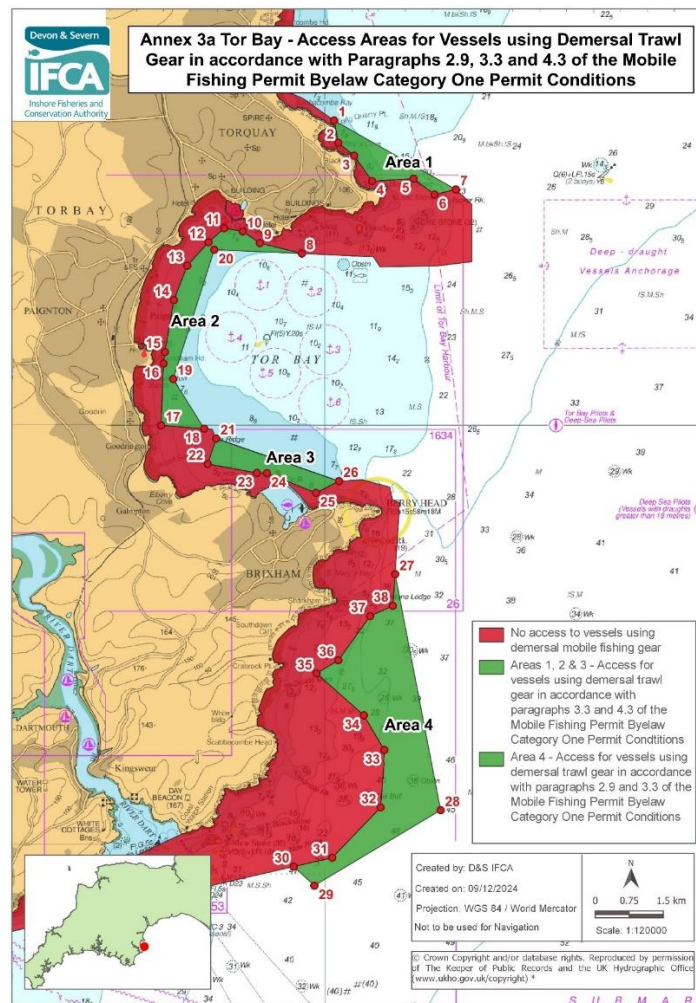


Torbay Marine Conservation Zone, Monitoring and Control Plan Review 2025: Towed (demersal) Trawl Gear on Subtidal Mud.



**Lauren Parkhouse
 Environment Officer
 January 2026**

Version control history			
Author	Date	Comment	Version
Lauren Parkhouse	August 2025	Initial Draft	0.1
J. Stewart	December 2025	Reviewed and finalised	1.0

Background of Monitoring and Control Plan

All IFCA's have responsibilities in relation to the management of fishing activities in Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ) as laid out in Ss 124 to 126 and Ss 154 to 157 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009. In order to document and determine whether management measures are required to achieve the conservation objectives of a MCZ, MCZ assessments are carried out for gear/feature interactions within a site.

Torbay MCZ has a number of qualifying features, including subtidal mud. This feature is the subject of this document, and the gear interaction under consideration is demersal trawling.

Version 1 of the MCZ assessment (2016) put forward the proposal to prohibit demersal trawling within the Torbay MCZ, much of which already had closures in place for the rock features and seagrass. After consultation, including an economic impact survey, it was concluded that part of the mud feature would continue to have access for demersal trawls for a limited time each year. There is access to part of the site from 1st April to 30th June each year under D&S IFCA's Mobile Fishing Permit Byelaw Category One Permit Conditions, which allows the inshore cuttlefish fishery to operate during the cuttlefish season. This is carried out in Area 2 of the access areas (see Annex 1).

The cuttlefish fishery is undertaken using otter trawls. There was a lack of literature on the impact of this method on the subtidal mud feature. A Before and After, Control and Impact Study (BACI) was carried out to try to address this evidence gap. The results suggested little detectable impact of the gear type. The [results of this study](#) fed into [Version 2](#) of the MCZ Assessment (2019), which concluded, with the temporal and spatial management measures in place, the activity would be unlikely to have a significant impact on the mud feature.

However, there was some uncertainty of the level of activity during the cuttlefish fishery, which led to a [Monitoring and Control Plan](#) (M&C Plan) being developed in 2019. A second version of the [M&C Plan](#) was created in 2024 due to the levels of fishing effort between 2019 and 2023 being too low to establish a relevant baseline and trigger point for reviewing the MCZ assessment if necessary.

Version 2 of the M&C Plan sets the trigger point for a review of the MCZ assessment at the level of activity carried out in the BACI study. This was five repeated passes of a trawl at six sites with 1200m-long trawl areas.

This report should be read in conjunction with [Version 2](#) of the MCZ Assessment, and [Version 2](#) of the Monitoring and Control Plan.

M&C Plan Actions

1. Monitoring of Fishing Activity

The M&C Plan sets out two actions to aid monitoring of the fishing activity at the site. The first action is to monitor the number of vessels, via the number of D&S IFCA Mobile Fishing Permits issued, which could potentially fish within the Torbay MCZ.

The second action is to monitor these vessels using Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS) and Inshore VMS (IVMS). Monitoring was specified as including the number of vessels within the area in the open season, and the effort level of each of these vessels.

Permit numbers were established, and VMS and IVMS data were obtained from the MMO for the 2019 baseline document. In 2019 there were a total of 35 permit holders in the ports of Torbay that use trawls. Only one vessel entered the area being monitored on one occasion in 2019. More detail from the 2019 fishery can be read in the [baseline](#) report. This monitoring has been conducted annually since 2019.

In 2025 there were 39 valid Mobile Fishing Permit holders in the ports of Torbay which indicated that they use some form of trawling gear, an increase of four vessels from the 2019 baseline number. Of these 39 vessels, 24 are under 12m in length. Although there are 39 vessels with the potential to trawl in the area, it should be noted that the vast majority would not, and instead fish further offshore and outside of the Torbay area. To D&S IFCA Officers' knowledge few, if any, over 12m vessels operate in this area.

IVMS data were examined via the Themis platform for all demersal trawl vessels which entered the access area of the Torbay MCZ between 1st April and 30th June 2025, at fishing speeds of 2 to 4 knots. During this time, one demersal trawl vessel entered the area. This vessel carried out five tows on the edge of the open area on the 30th April 2025 (Annex 2). None of these five tows exceeded the 1200m of the tows carried out during the BACI study. The BACI study demonstrated no discernible impact on sediment composition or macrofaunal assemblage after five passes of mobile gear, at six sites with 1200m-long trawl areas. No other vessels entered the area during the 2025 season.

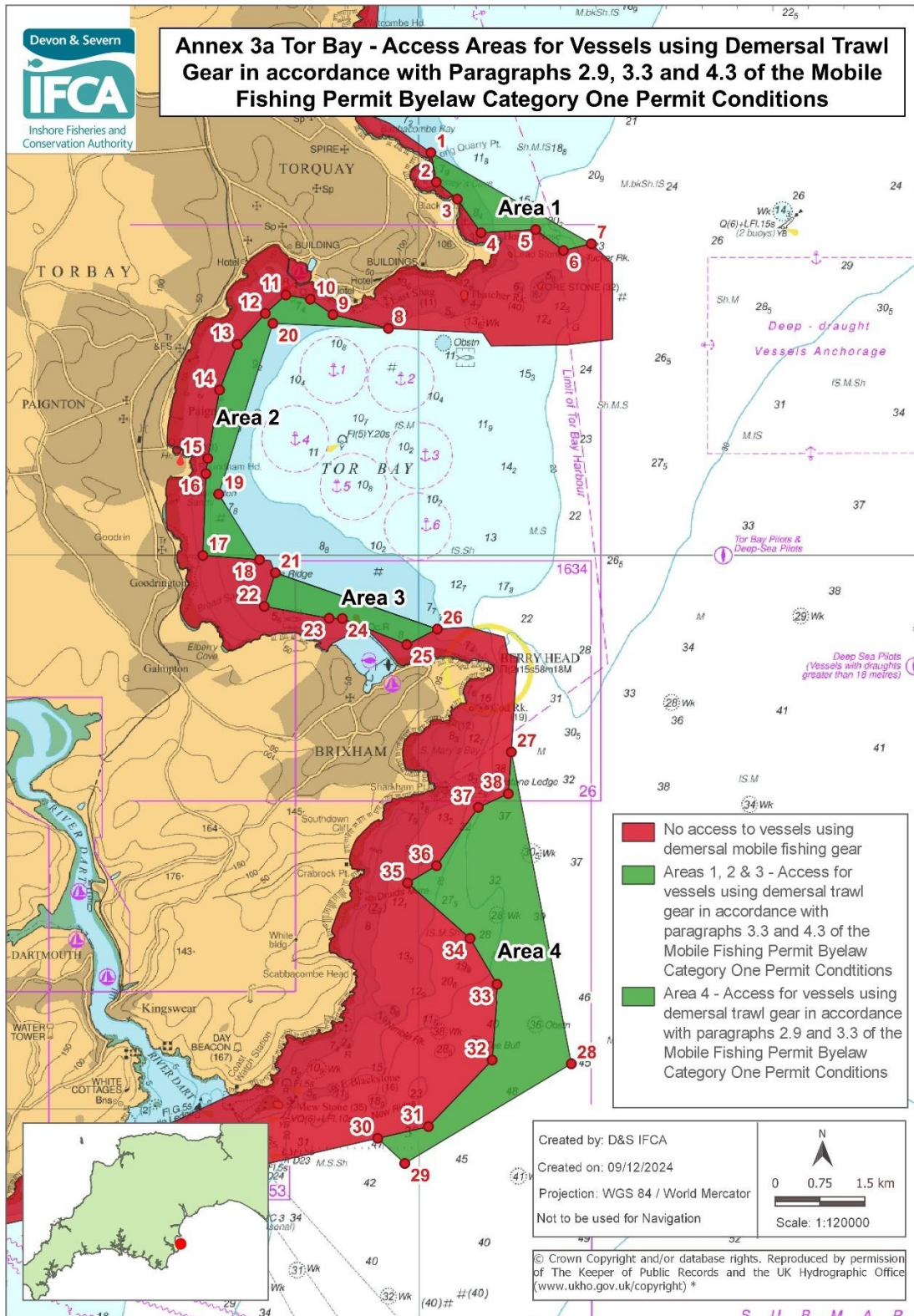
2. Changes to Access Areas

In 2022, D&S IFCA's Byelaw and Permitting Sub-Committee reviewed the Mobile Fishing Permit Byelaw and Permit Conditions and agreed to make the new Mobile Fishing Byelaw 2022. As part of this review changes to Annex 3a of the permit conditions were agreed and consulted on; the changes reduced the access area to demersal trawl gear in the Torbay MCZ to protect the full extent of seagrass in the Torre Abbey area. The finalised Mobile Fishing Permit Byelaw 2022, together with its Permit Conditions, was sent to the MMO for review in 2023 and was signed off by the Secretary of State on 4th March 2026. Whilst awaiting the signing off of the Byelaw, in September and December 2024 the Byelaw and Permitting Sub-Committee (B&PSC) agreed to apply the Torbay access changes in the current permit conditions, which were amended in December 2024. The updated Annex for the conditions is shown in Annex 1 and was used for the 2025 review of the M&C Plan. The new Annexes for the Mobile Fishing Permit Byelaw 2022 will be used in the 2026 review of the M&CP.

Summary

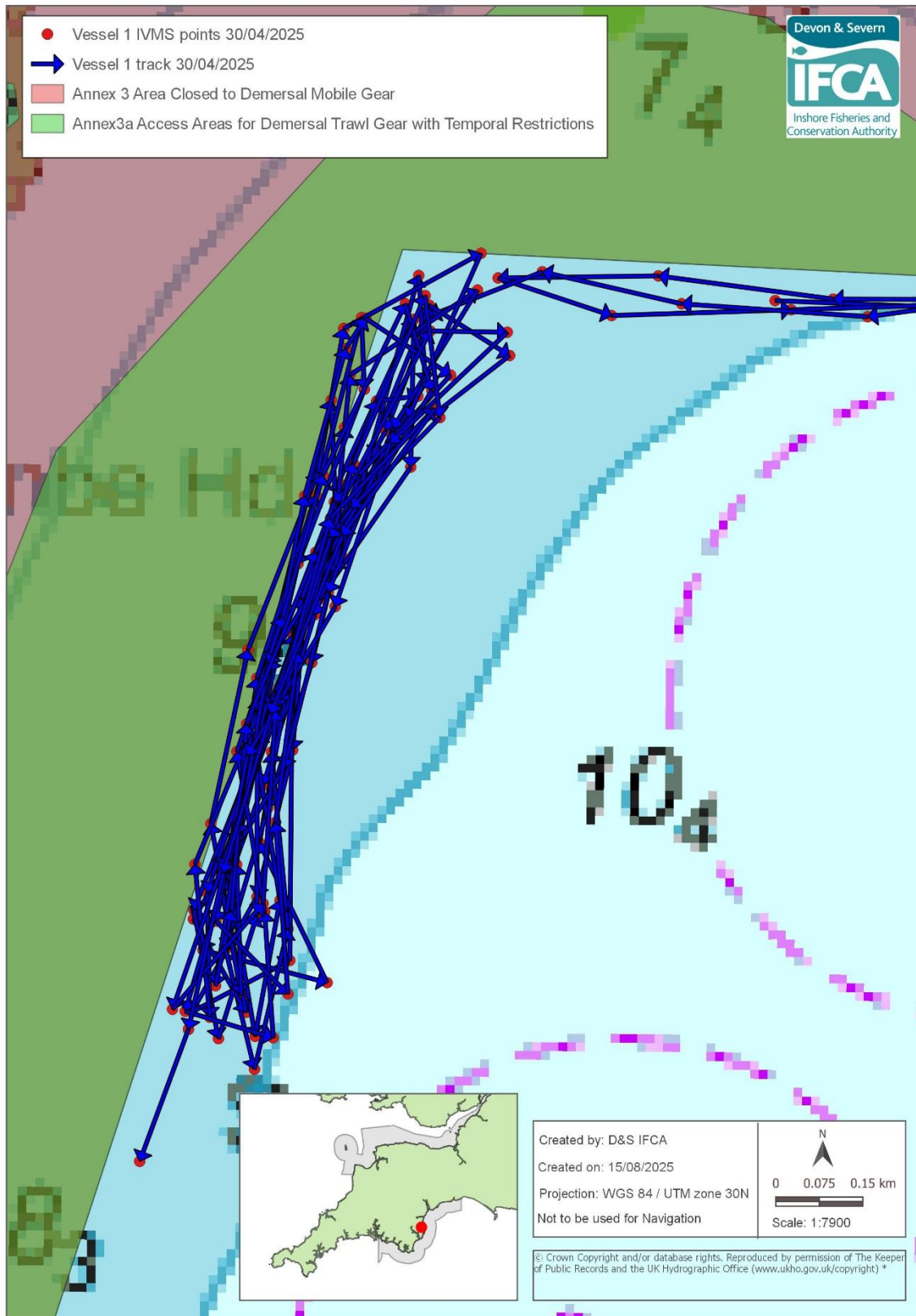
The IVMS data indicated there was one vessel which carried out five tows within the site. This level of activity is below the trigger point and therefore a review of the MCZ assessment is not appropriate at this time. The permit numbers and vessel activity will be reviewed again in 2026.

Annex 1- Access areas under the Mobile Fishing Permit Byelaw



* www.ukho.gov.uk/copyright

Annex 2- IVMS data of Demersal Trawl Gear 2025



IVMS data of demersal trawl gear within the access area on 30/04/2025. *www.ukho.gov.uk/copyright