



**Co-Development of  
a Code of Conduct for Fishing  
with Pots and Traps in the  
Torbay Marine Conservation Zone**

**Final Report**

**April 2026**

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# Co-Development a Code of Conduct for Fishing with Pots and Traps in the Torbay Marine Conservation Zone

## 1. Purpose of the Summary

This provides an overview of how a Code of Conduct for fishing with pots and traps within mapped seagrass zones in the Torbay Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) has been co-developed. The Code itself is provided in Annex 1.

## 2. Background

D&S IFCA Officers carried out a Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) Assessment for the interaction of cuttle traps on the seagrass and long snouted seahorse (*Hippocampus guttulatus*) features of the site. The conclusion of the MCZ assessment (TOR-MCZ-005 Version 4) was that potting for cuttlefish may hinder the achievement of the conservation objectives of the site. Evidence from the D&S IFCA's gear trials showed that hauling of strings of cuttlefish traps, which have more than two traps attached, can cause them to drag across the seagrass and cause damage through abrasion and uprooting of seagrass. However, evidence suggests that single traps or strings of two traps may not cause this damage as they tend to lift directly upwards into the water column during hauling.

The MCZ Assessment concluded that management measures may need to be implemented relating to cuttlefish traps to ensure the conservation objections of the site are furthered. This would fulfil D&S IFCA's duty under S.154 Marine and Coastal Access Act (MaCAA). Natural England has provided formal advice agreeing with this conclusion.

Members of the D&S IFCA's Byelaw and Permitting Sub-Committee (B&PSC) were informed in June 2025 that management measures could include spatial or gear restrictions under revised Potting Permit Conditions, and/or informal measures such as a voluntary code of conduct.

At the October 2025 B&PSC meeting Members agreed to support the co-development and implementation of a Code of Conduct aimed at minimising the impact of potting/trapping on seagrass in the Torbay MCZ, without the introduction, at this time, of formally legislative management. Natural England supported the voluntary approach provided it is monitored and reviewed.

## 3. Meeting with Fishers: November 2025

A meeting was held between D&S IFCA Officers and fishers in November 2025 to discuss the potential for a Code of Conduct.

At the meeting, there was broad agreement that any future voluntary commitments should be limited to seagrass zones, mapped as accurately as possible. There was also broad support for developing a Code of Conduct focused on using vessel positioning and hauling technique to reduce drag, reflecting fishers' best practice in the area.

Officers and fishers discussed whether this voluntary code could include an initial limit to the number of traps per string in mapped seagrass areas for the next cuttlefish season. This prompted discussions of the evidence used in D&S IFCA's MCZ Assessment and fishers'

concerns about whether previous research (conducted in Torbay using Cornwall IFCA's research vessel) represents their real fishing practices (e.g., trap spacing, haul methods, and use of end weights).

Although D&S IFCA's assessment and management considerations were based on the best available evidence, Officers recognised there may be value in updating some elements of the evidence base by engaging in research with fishers in Spring 2026.

The November 2025 meeting also highlighted some discrepancies between information provided by fishers during individual phone calls with fishers and information provided by fishers in the group setting of the meeting. For example, some fishers highlighted that end weights may be used more widely than Officers had understood, and that they may help reduce pot drag. Officers agreed that the effects of end weights on drag could be subject to further investigation as part of the collaborative research in Spring 2026.

There were also questions about how other IFCA's are managing fishing interactions with seagrass habitats, and how the impacts of other activities, such as recreational anchoring, were being managed so as not to single out fishing as a sole cause of damage to the seagrass. Officers reiterated that although anchoring by recreational vessels could not be managed directly by D&S IFCA under its statutory remit, Officers have repeatedly raised this with Natural England and MMO. Officers also agreed to engage with the Tor Bay Harbour Master on this issue, and on the potential for an increase in gear-marking buoys in the Bay, associated with the use of shorter strings of cuttle fish traps in seagrass areas.

## **4. Building on Engagement with Fishers after November 2025**

### **4.1 Evidence Review**

Following the November 2025 meeting, Officers checked the evidence used in D&S IFCA's MCZ Assessment in response to fishers' questions during the meeting. A summary of the evidence with answers to direct questions was provided to fishers by e-mail for clarification.

Officers also reviewed assessments and guidance produced by other IFCA's for potting on seagrass, again in response to questions raised by fishers. This information was shared with fishers. Other than D&S IFCA, only Cornwall IFCA has undertaken research and identified a potential interaction of potting on seagrass in their District. Cornwall IFCA's research in Cornwall used parlour pots to investigate impacts on seagrass during hauling of short strings of pots (up to six pots). This work demonstrated that was an impact. Cornwall IFCA has created fishery guidance, which encourages fishers to avoid areas of seagrass. If seagrass cannot be avoided, the guidance encourages fishers to use single pots instead of strings, and to ensure their hauling technique avoids pot drag.

### **4.2 Individual engagement**

Due to the discrepancies highlighted between information provided by fishers during individual phone calls compared to information provided in the group setting of the November 2025 meeting, Officers conducted follow-up phone calls with fishers. These were used to find out from individuals where strings of traps are used, where and whether end weights are used, and whether individuals would be supportive of a three-trap-per-string limit to apply only in mapped seagrass zones. In addition to the information provided during these follow up phone calls, individual fishers were able to voice concerns that they felt could not be raised in the group setting.

Most (but not all) of those that regularly fish in or near seagrass zones were supportive of a three-trap-per-string limit to apply only in mapped seagrass zones. Other Permit Holders objected in principle to this approach, but most of these objections were from those who confirmed that they do not usually fish in those areas.

#### **4.3 Information sharing**

Following those individual phone calls, Officers shared with fishers: (i) a summary of the evidence used to date, (ii) Cornwall IFCA's fishery guidance and (iii) a draft Code of Conduct based on discussions in the November 2025 meeting and follow-up phone calls. Officers also arranged a meeting for 12<sup>th</sup> February 2026 to further co-develop the details of the Code of Conduct with Permit holders.

### **5. Details and Outcomes of February 2026 Co-Development Meeting**

A meeting was held between D&S IFCA Officers and fishers on 12<sup>th</sup> February 2026 to complete the co-development of the Code of Conduct for 2026. Information sharing prior to the meeting (Section 4.3) allowed fishers to review the draft Code of Conduct in advance of the meeting, and discussions focused on remaining areas of concern. The Tor Bay Harbour Master was unable to attend this meeting due to prior commitments but has offered to meet at another time to discuss any concerns.

#### **5.1 Discussion around fishing with static gear other than cuttlefish traps & Outcomes**

The Code of Conduct sets out that only cuttle traps may be used in mapped seagrass zones. At the meeting, and in two phone calls prior to the meeting, a small number of Permit Holders expressed concern at the exclusion of other types of pot from seagrass zones and highlighted their use of fixed nets in seagrass zones.

In a previous MCZ assessment for fishing with other types of pot in Torbay, D&S IFCA determined that other pot types were not used in areas of seagrass and therefore concluded that crab and lobster pots/creels present no significant risk of the activity hindering the conservation objectives of the seagrass features assessed. Natural England agreed with D&S IFCA's conclusions.

However, this recent engagement with fishers has highlighted that fishing with crustacea pots does occur on seagrass in Torbay MCZ. Some fishers suggested that they would not expect this to impact upon the seagrass, although Officers were able to highlight research conducted by Cornwall IFCA, which demonstrated an impact from parlour pots being hauled in seagrass habitats.

**Outcome 1:** Officers and fishers discussed that a small number of parlour pots or other crustacea pots could be included in research trials in Spring 2026 in order to investigate the potential for drag.

**Outcome 2:** On the basis that the research described above would go ahead, fishers agreed that the Code of Conduct for 2026 should exclude the use of pots other than cuttlefish traps from mapped seagrass zones.

**Outcome 3:** Additional evidence gathering will inform a review of D&S IFCA's MCZ Assessment for the potential interaction between crustacea pots and seagrass in Torbay MCZ. This will include direct gear impact studies as highlighted above and a review of local

fishing activity, based on direct observation, stakeholder communications and review of Inshore Vessel Monitoring data.

At the February 2026 meeting, some fishers also provided details around their use of fixed nets in seagrass in Torbay MCZ. D&S IFCA has implemented a Monitoring and Control Plan for netting on seagrass in Torbay MCZ (September 2023) due to uncertainty around levels of activity and impacts. Although there is lack of evidence on the impacts of netting on seagrass, it is thought that with the levels of activity in Torbay, any impact would be at low levels.

The Monitoring and Control Plan highlights that the configuration of nets, seasonality of activity in seagrass areas, and anchor types is also not clear. From evidence of boat anchoring on seagrass, the type of anchor used could determine level of any impact.

**Outcome 4:** Officers will continue to undertake the Monitoring and Control Plan, including additional engagement with fishers and review of Inshore Vessel Monitoring data to understand the potential for impacts and whether the MCZ Assessment will need to be reviewed. Additional engagement with fishers has been delayed to date by the need to focus on potting on seagrass, which has been deemed to be of higher priority, and other priority workstreams.

## **5.2 Gear Hauling Method**

A short discussion highlighted that fishers agreed that the method of hauling cuttlefish traps would affect the amount of drag that could occur over the seagrass.

**Outcome 5:** Hauling and handling practices for gear used in seagrass remain specified within the Code of Conduct.

## **5.3 Research Work**

D&S IFCA's discussed the intention to work with fishers in Spring 2026 to better understand how local fishing practices may cause or mitigate interactions between pots/traps and seagrass.

It was re-stated that D&S IFCA can provide financial contributions to recognise Permit Holders' assistance with boat-based research; for example, where D&S IFCA is able to fit the research around a Permit Holder's normal fishing activities, D&S IFCA is able to contribute up to £300 per day to mitigate disturbance to their fishing due to this research (e.g. due to extending the fishing day by up to a few hours), making this an additional contribution to a Permit Holders' earnings for the day.

Time commitments from fishers towards the research are likely to be relatively low. Officers would plan to fix underwater cameras to a small number of cuttlefish traps, which the fisher would place in seagrass zones for a short period of time (up to 15 minutes) before hauling the gear again. This allows time for the gear to settle on the seabed before the hauling process and if there is any drag along the seabed this can be observed using the underwater cameras. The battery life of the cameras limits the amount of time that the gear can remain on the seabed. This would be repeated several times, replacing camera batteries on each occasion. Officers also plan to use an underwater Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV) to observe static gear on the seabed.

Research outcomes would be used, alongside information about adherence to the Code of Conduct, to inform a review of the management approach for 2027.

**Outcome 6:** Fishers agreed that additional research would be valuable, both for cuttlefish traps and other types of pot. Some expressed an interest in being directly involved, provided that they were not the only ones involved.

Fishers were asked directly if, following the updated information and discussions, they felt able to support the Code of Conduct as presented at the February 2026 meeting.

**Outcome 7:** Fishers, who were present at the February 2026 meeting, agreed to the terms of the Code of Conduct.

## **6. Summary of Agreed Code of Conduct**

The Code of Conduct 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. 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 of Conduct also includes fisher commitments on hauling technique and engagement in research, in addition to commitments by D&S IFCA relating to monitoring, research, financial contributions for vessel time, and reporting to the B&PSC.

The Code also provides charts of the mapped seagrass zones. D&S IFCA has provided Permit Holders with WGS84 co-ordinates for all mapped seagrass zones. On request, D&S IFCA will also provide waterproof charts with a grid overlay to assist navigation with a GPS unit.

## **7. Next Steps**

- Officers are developing a robust research plan and begin research work in Spring 2026 to assess impacts of pots and traps on seagrass; this will be assisted by fishers as per their commitments to the Code of Conduct.
- Officers will 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.
- Officers have shared 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.
- Officers have publicised the Code of Conduct via D&S IFCA's website.

# Annex 1 – Torbay MCZ Potting Code of Conduct

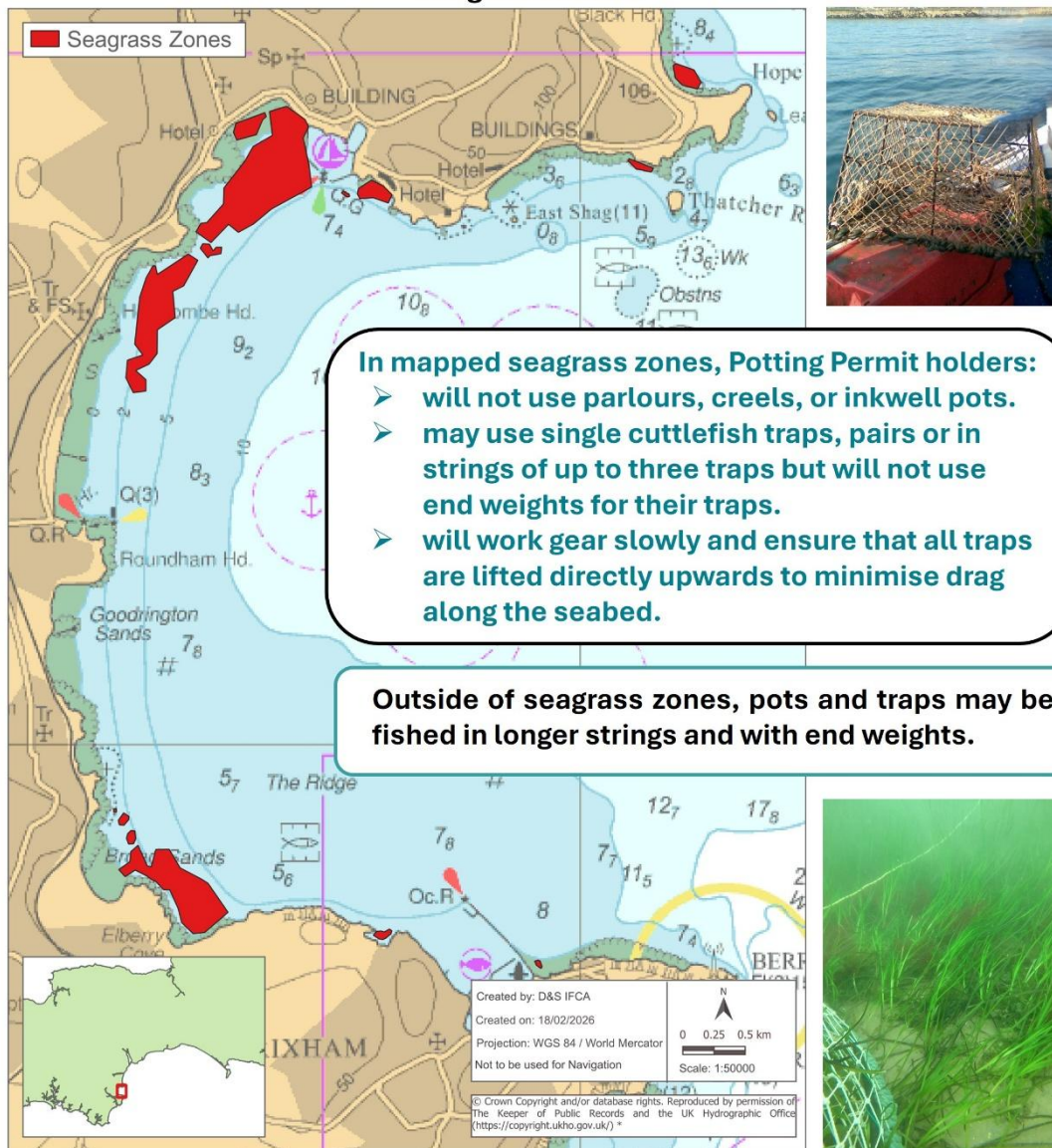


## Code of Conduct

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<sup>†</sup>.



**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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<sup>†</sup>D&S IFCA will provide fine-scale charts to Permit holders

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