



**D&S IFCA Progress on Marine
Protected Area Work
1st April 2026 to 30th June 2026**

29th July 2026

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MPA Specific Work

Bristol Chanel Approaches SAC (BCA SAC)

- D&S IFCA has continued to work on the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) in particular on bycatch, disturbance, prey availability and supporting habitats. Prey removal assessment has focussed on removal of cod, herring, whiting, sprat and sand eel across the District and landings data (expanding from just north of District) have been analysed using R. With regard to impacts to habitats (relating to condition on supporting habitats & processes, and availability of prey) the overlap between towed gear and the spawning habitat of herring and sand eel habitat (during key times of year) has been assessed through the Appropriate Assessment.
- The statistical analysis of landings data for D&S IFCA permit holders from the MMO and analysis of IVMS data has been completed to feed into the HRA for bycatch, prey availability and supporting habitats. The analysis has been comprehensive and fairly complex proving information on landings of cod, whiting, herring, sprat and sand eel.
- Conclusion for the removal of prey species - Overall, when considered alone, it can be concluded that at current levels, fishing by D&S IFCA Permit holders using static nets, passive nets, towed (demersal), towed (pelagic) dredges and static pots/traps will not adversely affect achievement of the Conservation Objectives for harbour porpoise in the BCA SAC.
- Analysis has been undertaken of fisheries activities operating at the CIS MU scale which is relevant for the in-combination assessment for prey removal and includes impacts of other activities on prey habitats.
- Literature reviews have continued in particular, relating to fish stock status; and have fed into the HRAs.
- The draft HRA for prey and supporting habitats is in the final review stage before being sent to Natural England for formal advice.
- Examples of the work undertaken include the following figures taken directly from the draft HRA in relation to prey and supporting habitats:

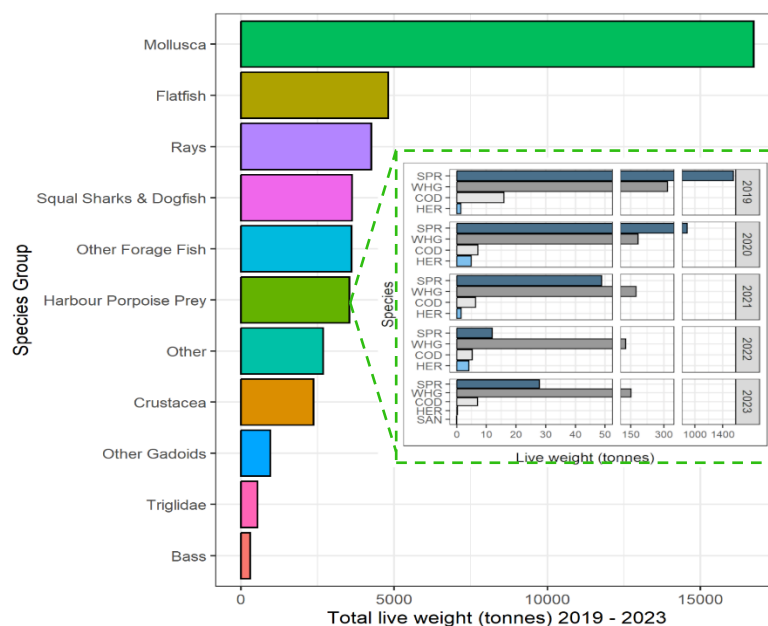


Figure 2. Total landings by holders of D&S IFCA Permits to ports in or near D&S IFCA's District, from fishing activities in ICES sub-rectangles which overlap with D&S IFCA's District, summed over 2019 – 2023 and grouped by species group (MMO landings data). Inset figure shows landings of harbour porpoise prey species per year to these ports. Note that this includes holders of Mobile Fishing Permits and Netting Permits. Landings by D&S IFCA Potting Permit holders are not included here, except in cases where holders of Mobile Fishing or Netting Permits also hold a Potting Permit. Potting Permit holders were not included in all cases as they do not target harbour porpoise prey species; therefore, the landings shown underrepresent the total landings by the fleet of certain species (particularly crustacea and whelk) that are not harbour porpoise prey species.

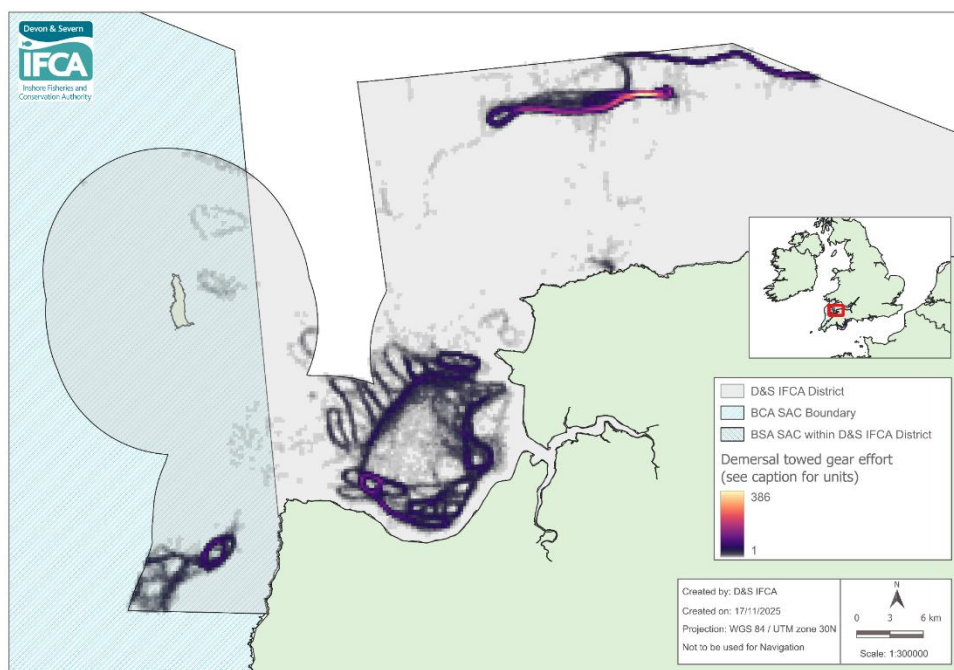


Figure 1. IVMS data of demersal towed gear vessels in the north of D&S IFCA's District during 2019

- The draft netting and towed gear HRAs in relation to bycatch are complete and need a final review before they are sent to Natural England for formal advice. These two HRAs focused on the whole of the D&S IFCA's District with an in-combination assessment considering bycatch at the Management Unit scale.

Torbay MCZ

- The finalised Code of Conduct was sent out to all Potting Permit Holders on 16th March 2026. Information sent out to Permit Holders also included charts and positional data of the seagrass beds in the MCZ. The Code of Conduct will help to fulfil D&S IFCA's duty to protect the features of the MCZ, but in a way that balances environmental protection with the social and economic benefits of the local fishing activities, recognising the value of co-developing an informal management approach.
- Since the Code of Conduct came into being and was publicised in March 2026, D&S IFCA Officers have developed a research plan to assess impacts of pots and traps on seagrass and undertaken boat-based research work with fishermen involved in the survey to assess impacts of pots and traps on the seagrass feature and to effectively monitor adherence to the Code of Conduct. Since April 2026 six at-sea surveys have been undertaken working collaboratively with the cuttlefish fishermen. Video footage and data collected are currently being analysed.
- Officers have been analysing IVMS data to inform a review of the Monitoring and Control Plan (M&CP) that is in place for trawling vessels operating over the mud feature of the Torbay MCZ. For the 2026 fishery, which is open between 1st April and 30th June 2026, a review of the fishing activity has taken place through the analysis of IVMS data. The M&CP was completed in July 2026. No demersal towed gear activity took place on the mud feature of the Torbay MCZ and therefore no trigger points were met so a review of MCZ assessments is not required. The draft M&CP review will be finalised in the next few weeks and will be sent to Natural England.

Severn Estuary EMS

- Officers attended the Severn Estuary Forum in June 2026 and gave an update on D&S IFCA's work in particular relating to the Severn Estuary Condition SAC Assessment and BCA SAC.
- Officers attended the Association of Severn Estuary Relevant Authorities' meeting in May 2026.

Taw Torridge Estuary SSSI

- The Taw Torridge Estuary Mussel Stock assessment report was completed and published in April 2026. It can be read [here](#). Officers analysed data from the annual mussel stock assessment survey carried out in 2025.

Exe Estuary SPA

- Officer engaged with the Exe Estuary Partnership.
- D&S IFCA Officers have undertaken a mussel stock assessment on the Exe Estuary MPA, and the report was published on the D&S IFCA website in June 2026. It can be read [here](#).
- Officers have engaged with shellfishermen and an aquaculture consultant on a project proposal for FaSS funding. The project 'Invasive to Native' provides an opportunity for D&S IFCA to work with industry to assess the efficiency and impact of different techniques to manage and control wild settlement of Pacific oysters within shellfish farm sites in a Marine Protected Area. An application has been submitted to FaSS for funding of the project and D&S IFCA is waiting for a response to the application.

Lundy MPA

- Officers have attended two meetings of the Lundy MPA Advisory Group and the Management Group in April 2026. D&S IFCA also attended a North Devon Biosphere meeting in April and have responded to data request from the North Devon Biosphere five North Devon Biosphere Marine Project Co-ordinator. The request for data and information relates to a potential project that the Biosphere are applying for funding relating to rewilding and fisheries management. The request included available data on fishing activity within or near MPAs in the Biosphere including:
 - Permit numbers (potting and netting)
 - Are there specific blocks/areas where potting or netting is allowed?
 - Towed gear – are there any heat maps available?
 - Taw/Torridge estuary data (shellfish data / sprat ridge / mussels)
 - Any spatial datasets or reports relating to Lundy or nearby MPAs
 - Evidence or assessments used to inform local fisheries management measures

The data were gathered and sent to the Biosphere Marine Co-Ordinator or links provided to access information on D&S IFCA's website.

- Officers continue to access IVMS data through the UK hub to review mobile fishing activity by D&S IFCA Mobile Fishing Permit holders in the Lundy MPA as part of the M&CP for Lundy SAC.

Dart MCZ

- Since the beginning of 2026 Officers have engaged with the Duchy of Cornwall regarding their stance on wanting to remove pacific oyster production in the Dart MCZ

and the Waddeton Regulating Order area, which expired in April 2026. The Duchy has remained steadfast in their approach to the cultivation of pacific oyster in the Duchy estuaries including the Dart and Avon Estuary MPAs. The Executive Director of Rural confirmed this in an e-mail to D&S IFCA's Chief Officer in April 2026 stating:

I confirm that the Duchy of Cornwall position remains unchanged in respect of Pacific Oyster cultivation and confirm that we wish to see this phased out. We have been clear and consistent throughout as to our rationale which we believe reflects a precautionary approach to protecting vulnerable estuarine ecosystems from the ecological risks associated with an invasive and increasingly fertile species.

- All pacific oyster cultivation has ceased across Duchy owned fundus in these MPAs.
- D&S IFCA has been discussing with the Duchy of Cornwall's agent and the shellfishermen who worked on the Dart Estuary as to the necessary clean-up of the Order area.

Devon Avon MCZ

- As discussed above – the Duchy of Cornwall's position remains unchanged and pacific oyster production has ceased in the MCZ.

Hartland Point to Tintagel MCZ

- Requirements under the M&CP for mobile fishing gear in the Hartland Point to Tintagel MCZ including monitoring the number of vessels that could potentially fish in the MCZ and fishing activity through IVMS data interrogation. Monitoring of IVMS in 2025 was carried out and there was not demersal mobile fishing activity identified in the site. A review of the M&CP was undertaken, and a report was produced and published in April 2026. It can be viewed [here](#).

Consultations, Events and Meetings

HRA Guidance Consultation May 2026

D&S IFCA responded to the HRA Guidance Consultation on 20th May 2026 giving detail responses to the questions asked in particular in relation to the principles outlined in the consultation, on how real risks should be identified and those relating to in-combination effects. Detail was also given in regard to scientific doubt, compensatory measures and mitigation measures.

Regular meetings with Natural England

Attended two meetings with Natural England to update on MPA work being undertaken and planned work. These meeting provided useful updates on both organisations' work.

Estuary Forum Meetings

Attended meetings of the Salcombe / Kingsbridge Estuary (SSSI) Forum; Lundy Marine Protected Area Advisory and Management Groups; Avon Estuary (MCZ) Forum; Tamar Estuaries (SAC, SPA, MCZ) Consultative Forum; Exe Estuary (SPA) Management Partnership; Dart Estuary (MCZ) Forum; North Devon UNESCO Biosphere Partnership (covers the Hartland Point to Tintagel MCZ, Bideford to Foreland Point MCZ, Morte Platform MCZ, Lundy MPA).

Inshore Focus Session MPA Management

Offices attended the Inshore focus session on MPA management on 5th June 2026 organised by Defra with IFCA and MMO attending, where policy drivers, targets, condition assessment and condition reporting was discussed.

MPA Assessment Tool

In May 2026 a workshop session was organised by Defra to run through the MPA Assessment tool 2026.

Exemptions to Byelaws

Several exemptions to byelaw for research have been granted this quarter for activities in MPAs. These can be read [here](#) on the D&S IFCA website and, for example, include:

- University of Plymouth – sampling juvenile bass in the Otter Estuary and Tamar Estuary MPAs.
- Environment Agency – beam trawling and seine netting for the WFD surveillance monitoring programme in Exe Estuary, SPA Dart Estuary MCZ and Taw Torridge Estuary SSSI
- Seascope Consultancy – collection of nudibranchs from the Lundy MPA and NTZ.

Byelaws and Permit Conditions

Category One (at Sea) Mobile Fishing permit Conditions were changed and came into force on 1st July 2026. The changes relate to vessel monitoring and mariculture sites. Vessel monitoring is a key compliance monitoring and enforcement tool used by D&S IFCA. The Category One Mobile Fishing Permit Conditions now set out that data from a vessel monitoring device can be received by the UK VMS hub, or the data is made available to the Authority via the supplier's platform. This agreed change enables all Permit Holders to be compliant with the provisions relating to transmission of data when operating under a D&S IFCA Category One Mobile Fishing Permit within the District if the vessel has a fully functioning IVMS device supplied by either CLS UK Ltd (formally Fulcrum Maritime) or Rewire. Permit holders have been informed that to be compliant with the Marine Management Organisation Fishing Licence Condition; the vessel must have a fully functioning CLS UK Ltd device.

Enforcement and Compliance Monitoring

D&S IFCA continues to investigate spatial incursions into MPA. An investigation was carried out by D&S IFCA which led to a successful prosecution in April 2026. The Owner and the Master of the 14.99m Fishing Vessel Southern Spirit E333 were fined £46,328 including £4,500 payable in compensation for a potter who had suffered pot losses. On 23rd April 2026, Plymouth Magistrates' Court heard about repeated illegal incursions by fishing vessel Southern Spirit E333 into a Marine Protected Area in South Devon. The case involved the illegal use of 12 scallop dredges over sensitive, vulnerable and highly designated features within the Skerries Bank and Surrounds Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ). During six fishing trips in March 2025, there were incursions into the MCZ on 10 separate days.

In 2018 D&S IFCA introduced a requirement for all mobile fishing vessels over 6.99 metres, operating at sea in its District, to have Inshore Vessel Monitoring System (IVMS) fitted which must be fully functional when a mobile fishing vessel is at sea and transmit the positional data

every three minutes within Marine Protected Areas. The use of IVMS data was a key part of the investigation. Following reports of pot losses in the area, it was the analysis of IVMS data, after the incursions had occurred in March 2025, that led to a full investigation.

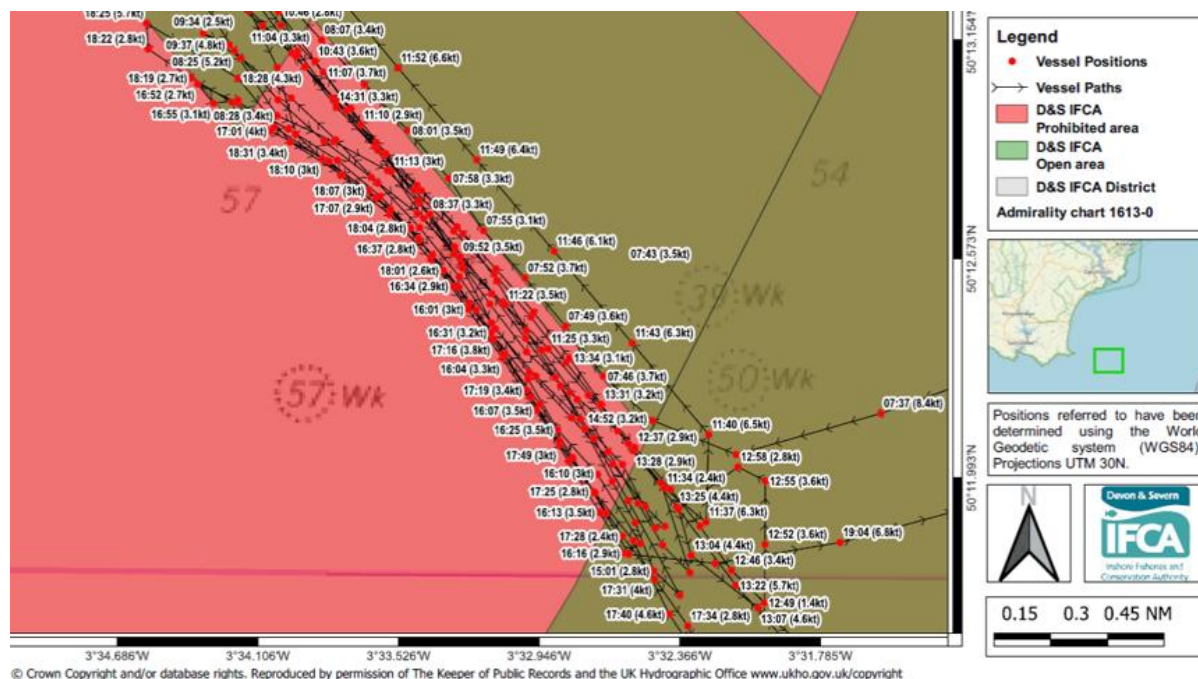


Image above: IVMS tracks from FV Southern Spirit E333 within an MPA (red area).

Evidence provided to the Court showed that even a single pass of a trawl or dredge can remove around half of the benthic abundance and a third of the species richness, with recovery taking years. The news item can be read [here](#) on the D&S IFCA's website.

D&S IFCA continues to progress three ongoing prosecutions involving Plymouth registered vessels for offences including illegal netting, most of which have occurred in MPAs in the South of the District.. These have been going on for some time with one case dating back to March 2024. Generally, there has been a reduction in the reports of illegal netting, which could be indicative of a reduction in that activity, however the issue remains one of the highest priorities for the Enforcement team and D&S IFCA continues to commit significant resource into targeted patrols.