



D&S IFCA's
Response to Marine Licence
Application for a seaweed farm in
Tor Bay South Devon
MLA/2022/00183

11th August 2022

Devon and Severn Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (D&S IFCA) is a statutory consultee for Marine Licences submitted to the Marine Management organisation (MMO). D&S IFCA is responding to MLA/2022/00183 for a proposed seaweed farm in Tor Bay.

D&S IFCA statutory duties are to :

- (a) seek to ensure that the exploitation of sea fisheries resources is carried out in a sustainable way,
- (b) seek to balance the social and economic benefits of exploiting the sea fisheries resources of the district with the need to protect the marine environment from, or promote its recovery from, the effects of such exploitation,
- (c) take any other steps which in the authority's opinion are necessary or expedient for the purpose of making a contribution to the achievement of sustainable development, and
- (d) seek to balance the different needs of persons engaged in the exploitation of sea fisheries resources in the district.

D&S IFCA is supportive of mariculture developments as it fulfils its statutory duties in particular those of sustainable development, but D&S IFCA must also be mindful of the need to seek to balance the needs of all persons engaged in the exploitation of sea fisheries resources, and of marine conservation.

Biome Algae Ltd has been in contact with D&S IFCA regarding the proposed seaweed farm. The location was discussed and some charts, from previous D&S IFCA fishing activity surveys, were provided to Biome Algae Ltd. The Fisheries Assessment that has been submitted by Biome Algae Ltd shows the charts provided. It needs to be made clear that the fishing activity surveys, in particular those for netting and potting, had a less than 30% response from fishers to the survey and therefore quoting the number of vessels as a clear indication of the level of activity must be viewed with some caution. Fishers netting and potting activity will change year on year depending on the fishery itself and therefore there may be higher levels of activity in the area proposed for the seaweed farm.

A chart of IVMS data from fishing vessels using demersal fishing gear was provided to Biome Algae Ltd. These data were only for one year and indicated at least two vessel fishing across the area, but as previously stated vessel will change their activity and in any other year there may be more vessels using demersal gear in the proposed farm location. In 2019, six other vessels operated close to the proposed site, and it may be in other years these vessels may operate in the area. Therefore, using one-year's data, whilst useful in showing activity for that year may not be indicative of previous or future years' activity. D&S IFCA appreciates that the applicant has moved the farm slightly to the south to avoid the area where demersal fishing vessel were seen to operate in 2019, to try and mitigate and reduce the impact to the fishing industry.

The main concern for siting the farm in this location is conflict with other sea users and the demersal gear fleet. D&S IFCA has received reports from the scallop ranch in Torbay of lines being towed and damage to the infrastructure of the ranch. Other offshore shellfish farms, in D&S IFCA's District in Labrador Bay and Lyme Bay, have also experienced conflict with fishing vessels and had huge losses in both product and infrastructure.

Figure 9 of the Biome Fisheries Assessment Report shows the movement of vessel within Torbay between 2017 and 2020. Whilst the farm appears to avoid the most concentrate traffic channels there is still quite high levels of vessel traffic in the location – from the figure it appears that the levels are around 96 routes/0.08km²/year. Torbay is an extreme busy area for fishing vessels (one of the largest ports in England is located at Brixham), commercial vessels, ferries, angling and chart boat vessel, jet skis, power boats, sailing boats and other

recreational craft. It also has several deep-water anchorage designated areas. D&S IFCA would recommend that the applicant engages with the current Torbay Harbour Master, Rob Parsons, to seek his views on the proposal. D&S IFCA is aware that there are other proposed seaweed farms in the Tor Bay area and the number of proposals may be of concern to the Harbour Master.

With reference to the Seabed, Fisheries and Marine Mammals report submitted with the application, D&S IFCA would like to raise the point that grey seals are seen often in the Tor Bay area both within Brixham Harbour and across the Bay. The Seabed, Fisheries And Marine Mammals Report suggests that there may be marine mammals present on occasions this is 'expected to be rare for seals, dolphins and porpoise.' However, their presence is more regular than cited. Seals are known to haul out on Thatcher's Rock and there have been many records of seals interfering with netting gear in the Bay. In fact, D&S IFCA worked with Torbay fishers and ABP Mer, in 2019, to trial non-lethal seal deterrents on fishers' nets within the Bay due to the level of seal interference with the nets. There is a seal research and conservation charity based in Torbay called The Seal Project that identifies and records seal sightings in the area. In 2018 the maximum number of seals spotted in Torbay was 24. D&S IFCA would suggest that the applicant engages with this project for further information www.thesealproject.org. Common dolphins are seen regularly in Tor Bay – many having been seen by D&S IFCA Officers from its office at Brixham Laboratory. The Seawatch foundation (<http://www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk/>) records reported sightings and in three days in late July 2022 there were 29 sightings in the Torbay Area of common dolphins and five sightings of harbour porpoises. There are several businesses operating out Torbay ports engaged in whale and dolphin watching and there is a Facebook page 'Dolphins and Whales South Devon' that displays sighting.

In summary, whilst D&S IFCA is supportive of Mariculture developments in its District, and this is described in its Mariculture Strategy 2020, D&S IFCA wanted to highlight areas of concern in particular the potential conflict from other sea users that might occur with the siting of a seaweed farm of this size in its proposed location. D&S IFCA, as previously stated does appreciate that the applicant has moved the farm and reduced its size from the initial proposal to try and mitigate these potential issues. Further consultation with the fishing industry in the area might be beneficial to understand if there are potential impacts and raise awareness of the development. D&S IFCA is able to disseminate information to its Permit Holders, should the applicant request this.

Sarah Clark
Deputy Chief Officer
D&S IFCA