

Aird Gheiltinis Site, Ard Mhor - Planning proposal outline

The proposal for the development of this area would be to establish an oyster farm on the foreshore. This site would be used to grow oysters from as small as 1g up to 50-60g, as required.

Equipment:

The farm would use steel trestles to which bags of oysters would be attached. The weight of the trestles plus the oysters will hold the materials on site. There would be no need for fixings such as piles or anchors. The trestles would be relatively easily moved once stock has been taken off them.



Figure 1 Newly made trestle of the type to be used.

The trestles will each be 3m x 1m x 0.5m (l x b x h) and will be assembled in groups 10 trestles long by 2 wide. Each of the trestle blocks will be separated by 10m from other blocks. To allow them to be serviced from a tractor and trailer.



2 Trestle block on Eoligaray foreshore

The trestles will be below the surface at most stages of the tide as it is only when submerged the oysters can feed.

Once in place the trestles will attract growth of seaweed which will soften their edges and they will come to resemble rocky outcrops when viewed from a distance.

The bags used are made of a heavy plastic, Netlon, which has been used in the oyster farming industry for many years. Bags are plastic welded at one end and closed with a rod at the other. This is an effective system for keeping the oysters within the bags. We have a policy of removing all dead oyster shells from the foreshore. Other than being important for biosecurity, this enables us to quickly identify if a bag is torn or a closing rod has been lost.

Oysters:

The site will be used to grow *Crassostrea gigas*, commonly known as the Pacific or Rock oyster. This species is non native and does not breed in the sea water temperatures we experience around Barra.

Oysters are bivalve shellfish distantly related to cockles, razor fish and scallops. They feed by filtering plankton from the seawater which surrounds them. On oyster farms like the one proposed there is no need to feed the oysters artificially.

Site Servicing:

As there is no need to feed the oysters and they are covered by the sea for much of the day and on occasion for many days on end, servicing the site does not require a daily presence on the shore.

When tide conditions are right and the oysters can be accessed with a tractor and trailer, there are a number of jobs to do. The bags of oysters are turned and shaken to ensure that algal growth on top of the bags is reduced and that the oysters have plenty space around them to allow them to feed effectively when the tide returns. This work is done at low tide and will see staff on shore on around 4 days per month for the period 2-3 hours the tide is low enough to work.

Less frequently oysters are removed to enable them to be graded or harvested. This may involve moving some of the stock to a higher location on the beach where it can be accessed more easily.

We do not envisage our activities to be a significant disturbance and certainly little different from the activities of cocklers, who use the beach frequently, taking vehicles on to the beach. The noise generated by the tractor is unlikely to come close to that generated by the local air service using the head of the Traigh.

Environment:

The site is located within a mSAC, a pSAC and at the edge of an SSSI. We do not believe it will affect the designated features of these sites in a negative way. The trestles allow sand to move as the currents dictate. We will not affect reefs. The nearest seal haul out is at the point of Adrmhor and is situated relatively close to the existing ferry route which passes between the seal haul out and this site. The seals are tolerant of both the disturbance from sea going vessels, the ferry, fishing and leisure vessels and from noise disturbance from air traffic going to and from Barra Airport.

The trestles will stand on sandy areas of the shore. Experience on the Eoligaray site has shown that there can be a good deal of sediment movement in periods of stormy weather. The trestles will not impair this natural process.

We will not be putting equipment on reefs are very unlikely to impact them in any way.

Indications from our Eoligaray trestle site suggest that a wide variety of wildlife will continue to use the area of foreshore on which the trestles will be situated. The trestles, oysters and bags will provide new niches for some invertebrates and algae. We have observed birds, seals and otters in and among the Eoligaray trestles and would expect this site to be much the same.

Impact on current users:

There would be no intention to stop other activities on or around the site. It is unlikely the site is used for cockling as it is very seldom fully exposed, and then for very short periods of time.

Leisure users such as wind surfers or kayakers are unlikely to be affected, as for most of the tide the site will be well under water and will not be exposed at all in neap tides, i.e. for 10-12 days in any fortnight.

Visual Impact:

While the site is in view of two resident households in Ardmhor it will be approximately 400m from the nearest house.

As has been pointed out previously, for much of the time the site will be submerged, as such it will appear as a dark shadow much like a submerged reef against the sandy seabed. There is no doubt the site will be visible as a series of dark patches when the tide is low. It may be that the symmetry of the layout will highlight its artificial origin. In our experience from farming the Eoligarra shore site, the presence of trestles is more a point of interest than contention.

Other than using muted colours for the materials, there are no obvious mitigation measures which can be taken to reduce the visual impact, in the few hours of the day the trestles are visible.