

SCIENTIFIC EXPERIMENT TO UNDERTAKE GROWTH AND SURVIVAL TRIALS OF
NATIVE OYSTER, END PRODUCT OF NO COMMERCIAL VALUE AND NOT FOR
HUMAN CONSUMPTION

DORNOCH FIRTH - 3 SITES

CONSIDERATION OF SCOTLANDS NATIONAL MARINE PLAN

GEN 1 General planning principle: We consider that the proposed experimental deployment is consistent with the policies and objectives of Scotlands Marine Plan.

GEN 2 Economic benefit: Scientific experiment – no immediate benefit

GEN 3 Social benefit: Scientific experiment to inform wider ecosystem enhancement projects in the Dornoch Firth and elsewhere.

GEN 4 Co-existence: The proposals will have zero impact on other sectors. Navigational impacts have been considered within the experimental design.

1. The experimental equipment is of low profile, extending a maximum of 0.5m above the seabed.
2. For the east site, the proposed deployment will be in water which shows as being 5.5m at chart datum, The experiment will in effect reduce this to around 5.0m. We would contend that the deployment presents zero additional navigational hazard beyond that presented by the seabed itself in this area. Further, given that the entrance to the Firth is constrained by Tain Bar which has a minimum charted depth 1.2m, is considered highly unlikely that any vessel drawing sufficient depth to come into contact with the east experimental plot would be unable to access the Dornoch Firth. This site has been in use for this purpose since 2018
3. The west site lies close to the intertidal area at the South side of the Firth, well away from the deep water channel approaching the Dornoch Firth Bridge. This site has been in use for this purpose since 2018
4. The new mid site lies close to an intertidal area at the south side of the Firth, well away from the deep water channel approaching Dornoch Firth Bridge
5. The experimental equipment covers a maximum of only 22.5m² across the three proposed plots. There are 7.5m² of equipment spread over a 25m experimental plot on each site.
6. The only vessel regularly using the Firth was the Mussel Dredger (Gizzen Briggs) which historically operated in the Tain Mussel Fishery. This has now been sold by the operator, Highland Council. Other than this the Firth is closed to fishing with mobile gear.
7. If a mussel dredger is redeployed to the area during the course of the experiment or access rights are arranged for other vessels to operate in the fishery, it would be very straightforward to include the locations of the experimental deployment in the instructions to the skipper.
8. In any event the proposed experimental deployment is not coincident with any areas of mussel beds so the dredger/fishing vessel associated with the Tain

Mussel Fishery would never be in a position to make contact with the experimental equipment through dredging operations.

9. There is known to be a single creel fishing vessel which operates on the north side of the outer firth, it is believed that vessel operates from Portmahomack. The proposed experimental deployment would not interfere with the fishing operations of this vessel. If the vessel name and PLN can be identified the applicant will undertake to contact the skipper via MS Fishery Office to advise of the location of the experiment.
10. Very occasionally small craft and sailing vessels may operate from the Highland Council Jetty at Meikle Ferry North. Small craft may also operate from the Privately owned Jetty at Meikle Ferry South. It will straightforward to ensure that notices are placed at these jetties and at Highland Council, Portmahomack Harbour advising the operators of smallcraft that the experiment is ongoing.

Other than the 1-2 hours on 6 to 8 occasions across the 24 month experimental deployment when there will be a vessel on site and divers in the water we consider that the proposed experimental deployment presents no navigational hazard. Diver deployment will be during daylight hours. The vessel will fly international code flag Alpha and lookout will be maintained, Aberdeen Coastguard will be advised of vessel movement and operations on Channel 16. In the unlikely event that there are other vessel in the firth at the time they will be hailed by VHF and advised that diving operations are being undertaken.

GEN 5 Climate change: Short term of experiment means that there will be no impact on climate change

GEN 6 Historic environment: No impact

GEN 7 Landscape/seascape: No impact

GEN 8 Coastal process and flooding: No impact

GEN 9 Natural heritage. Site chosen lies outwith the SAC sandbank and reef features of interest.

GEN 10 Invasive non-native species.

Experiment will use native oysters. These will be sourced from Loch Ryan, Little Loch Broom, the Kyle of Durness and other locations and cleaned and quarantined prior to deployment in the Dornoch Firth

GEN 11 Marine litter: All equipment will be removed from the site at the completion of the experiment

GEN 12 Water quality and resource: no impact

GEN 13 Noise: short duration noise impacts from charter vessel used to deploy equipment at the start of the experiment and recover during the course of the experiment.

GEN 14 Air quality: no impact

GEN 18 Engagement: Short term experimental deployment which is subject to public consultation through the planning process. Project results to be disseminated via scientific literature.

GEN 21 Cumulative impacts: experimental deployment involves three small sites spread over c.7000m. No cumulative impacts are anticipated

FISHERIES 1 – 3 Dornoch Firth has a year round closure to mobile gear. Only exception is the Mussel Dredger operated by Highland Council. Proposed site lies outwith mussel beds.

AQUACULTURE 1-3 : N/A

AQUACULTURE 5: No impacts
AQUACULTURE 6: N/A
AQUACULTURE 7: No impacts
AQUACULTURE 8: Dornoch Firth Common seal SAC interest. Any vessel movements within the Firth will be undertaken in such manner as to avoid harassment of seals.
AQUACULTURE 9: N/A to small experimental deployment.
AQUACULTURE 10: No stakeholders will be affected by the proposed experimental deployment.
AQUACULTURE 11: deployment will utilise industry standard mesh oyster bags weighted and pinned to the seabed.
AQUACULTURE 12 - 14 N/A
WILD FISH 1: N/A
REC & TOURISM 1 - 5: N/A
TRANSPORT 1 - 6: N/A