

FEAS Observations on MUL240002 - Donegal, Seaweed Harvesting, Oilean Glas Teoranta.

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Summary

- Fisheries Ecosystems Advisory Services (FEAS) Marine Institute, were asked by DAFM for observations on MUL240002, an application for a MUL, submitted by Oilean Glas Teoranta for the purpose of hand harvesting seaweed (*Ascophyllum nodosum*) in intertidal zones of three bays in Co. Donegal: Dungloe Bay (8,000 wet tonnes/ year); Mulroy Bay (2,000 wt/y); Trawbreaga Bay (4,000 wt/y) for the purpose of fertiliser and animal feed production.
- The following response is with consideration of potential impacts on sea fisheries and the seafood sector, including aquaculture.
- A licence of up to 10 years is sought.
- Harvesting operations are not likely to impact fishing activities, fish biology or aquaculture activities.
- Aquaculture activities¹ and consultation with local licensed aquaculture operators is recommended:
 - Dungloe Bay: 21 licensed aquaculture sites
 - Mulroy Bay: 51 licensed aquaculture sites
 - Trawbreaga Bay: 77 licensed aquaculture sites
- SACs and SPAs are present in all three areas¹. It should also be verified that the particular activity complies with regulations that will safeguard the ecological integrity of the proposed site in view of the site's conservation objectives under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive and also have regard to the requirements of the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive. The activity must also be deemed to be in the public interest.
- Shellfish Water Directive areas present in all three areas¹.
- Fishing activities are recorded in close proximity, however owing to the littoral nature of *A. nodosum* these are unlikely to be effected².
- Likewise, spawning and nursery grounds of commercial important fish species, close to the three bays, are not likely to be effected².
- Estimates of abundance are somewhat dated:

“Estimates made of the national biomass of *Ascophyllum nodosum* vary from 159,000 wet tonnes (+ 45,000) by Cullinane (1984) to 75,000 wet tonnes by Hession et al. (1998). Guiry & Morrison (2013) note that between 8,000 – 28,000 wet tonnes of *Ascophyllum nodosum* were harvested annually in Ireland between 1964 and 2013 and that “there are sufficient unharvested areas to satisfy any requirement for conservation”.
- **It is likely that the proposed harvest rates are sustainable based on historic harvesting, however without any up-to-date or area specific estimates of *Ascophyllum nodosum* productivity this cannot be definitively stated. This is of concern. Since 2013 *Ascophyllum nodosum* abundance may have varied. As a littoral species, potential impact on biodiversity in the littoral zone of harvesting cannot be estimated.**
- Potential impact on individuals who have the right to harvest wild seaweed, namely those who hold *appurtenant rights* and *profite-a-prendre* rights, should be assessed.

¹ <https://dafm-maps.marine.ie/aquaculture-viewer/>

² 2014 – 2018; Ireland's Marine Atlas: <https://atlas.marine.ie>