



February 27, 2026

[licence@mara.gov.ie](mailto:licence@mara.gov.ie)

**RE: Maritime Usage Licence Application - Reference MUL240043**

A Chara

The Marine Divisions of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) welcome the opportunity to provide comments on the application from BioAtlantis Ltd for a Maritime Usage Licence to undertake seaweed harvesting of *Ascophyllum nodosum* in Clew Bay, Co. Mayo.

It is essential that the sea-fishing and aquaculture sectors are fully recognised and given a high priority as a long-standing, pre-existing, and traditional activity in the marine environment as the proposed activity is being evaluated.

Fishers and aquaculture site holders are primary food producers, dependent upon certain marine areas which are particularly important for food production. This primary production is critical to supplying the downstream indigenous seafood processing and export industries and in sustaining the livelihoods of coastal communities. The importance of these primary and secondary food production activities is reflected in the Government's Food Vision 2030 policy.

The seafood sector, including fishing, aquaculture, processing and ancillary support services, is an important source of employment in rural and coastal areas. BIM's [Business of Seafood 2024](#) report outlines that approximately 16,874 jobs (direct and indirect employment) are reliant on the seafood sector. The sector supports economic activity in peripheral coastal communities right around our coast. Many of these communities have limited alternative employment. DAFM welcomes the applicant's plans to hire up to sixteen full time harvesters, recruited from fishing or farming families that have experience of harvesting seaweed.

To inform the DAFM comments, the observations of the Marine Institute (MI) and Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM) on the application were requested.

BIM advised that they promote sustainable management of environmental resources and the use of best practices. Due to overlaps, the proposed hand harvesting seaweed activity would need to be compatible with existing active licenced aquaculture and inshore fisheries activities within the sought application area.

MI note that the assessment of *A. nodosum* resources and associated biodiversity in Clew Bay SAC (Appendix 1 in the submitted reports) is dated November 2014 and reporting on data gathered in September 2013 and based on previous work in 1998 and 2001.

**Oifigí an Rialtais, An tIonad Náisiúnta Bia Mara, An Cloichín, Cloich na Coillte, Co. Chorcaí, P85 TX47.**

Government Buildings, National Seafood Centre, Clogheen, Clonakilty, Co Cork, P85 TX47

T +353 (0)23 8859500

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An Assessment of “Algal harvesting in Clew Bay: pre-license survey, April – July 2016” is now approaching 10 years ago. Since 2013 / 2016 *Ascophyllum nodosum* abundance may have varied. DAFM would highlight the MI statement that the age of the scientific assessment is of concern. Please see the attached report from the MI for further information.

The MI also note that fifty-seven licensed aquaculture sites fall within the proposed harvest area, with Clew Bay a designated Shellfish Water Directive Area. Consultation with local licensed aquaculture operators is recommended.

DAFM recognises that the applicant’s aim is to promote co-existence and minimise potential disruption to commercial fishing activities in the area. The evaluation of potential impacts of seaweed harvesting on commercial sea fishing activities needs to be given consideration within the context of the requirements set out under the Maritime Area Planning Act and the National Marine Planning Framework. (NMPF).

The principles in the NMPF of avoiding, minimising, or mitigating impacts on access to existing activities (including specific policies on Fisheries and Aquaculture) should be followed and any proposed activity should incorporate the principle of maximising coexistence with established activities in marine areas.

Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) data regarding fishing in, and around, the licence application area may be limited as many of the vessels in the inshore fishing segment (less than 12 metres in length) are not currently required to carry VMS on board. While the proposed activity is not anticipated to impact unduly on inshore fishers, relevant local fishing organisations should nevertheless be engaged with at the earliest opportunity, to avoid disruption and potential displacement. Organisations representing inshore vessels include:

- The National Inshore Fisheries Forum (NIFF): <https://inshoreforums.ie/niff/>
- The Irish Islands Marine Resource Organisation (IIMRO): <https://www.iimro.org/>
- The National Inshore Fishermen’s Association (NIFA): <https://inshore.ie/>
- North West Regional Inshore Fisheries Forum (NWRIFF): <https://inshoreforums.ie/northwest-overview/>

All relevant fishing organisations should receive any applicable Marine Notices, and be made aware of any proposed activities, at the earliest opportunity to ensure the optimum coordination of activities and to limit potential disturbances to fishing activities to the greatest extent possible.

Yours sincerely,

#### **Marine Divisions**

**An Roinn Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Mara**

*Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine*

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