

FEAS Observations on MUL250011 - Kenmare Bay, Seaweed Harvesting, BioAtlantis Ltd.

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Summary

- Fisheries Ecosystems Advisory Services (FEAS) Marine Institute, were asked by DAFM for observations on MUL250011, an application for a MUL, submitted by BioAtlantis Ltd for the purpose of hand harvesting seaweed (*Ascophyllum nodosum*) from intertidal zones of areas within Kenmare Bay and adjoining Coulagh Bay, of 1,826 wet tonnes per year.
- 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.
- There are 43 licensed Aquaculture activities in close proximity¹ and consultation with local licensed aquaculture operators is recommended, Shellfish Water Directive areas present in all three areas¹. 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.
- 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 proposed harvest areas, are not likely to be effected².
- Estimates of abundance are somewhat dated:

“According to a study by the Marine Institute, Ireland has the potential to sustainably yield in excess of 74,000 tonnes (T) of *A. nodosum* per annum (Hession C, *et al.*, 1998). However, the annualized potential yield has been under-harvested (<30,000 tonnes is estimated to be harvested per annum) and the true potential of *A. nodosum* as a renewable resource in Ireland has not been realized. The majority of these resources are found in Galway, Mayo and Donegal and it has been estimated that ~70,500 potential wet tonnes per annum may be harvested sustainably from these areas. Estimates by Hession C, *et al.*, (1998) indicate that there are significant levels of *A. nodosum* in Kerry, with estimates of approximately 1,160 sustainable tonnes along the coastline of Kenmare Bay (excluding the islands).

The application proposes a developmental phase which will incorporate site visits to ascertain abundance of *Ascophyllum nodosum* in known areas and identify further areas. The submitted material indicates towards use of satellite photography and GIS to determine the available biomass, however on inspection (in the Natura Impact Statement) this appears to be estimation on potential harvest area, assuming presence/abundance/productivity of *A. nodosum* with limited *in-situ* observations.

It is likely that the proposed harvest rates are sustainable based on historic harvesting, however without any in-situ area specific estimates of *Ascophyllum nodosum* productivity this cannot be definitively stated. This is of concern. Since 1998, *Ascophyllum nodosum* abundance may have varied. As a littoral species, potential impact on biodiversity in the littoral zone of harvesting cannot be estimated.

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

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