

# FEAS-MI Observations on MUL250021 National Oceanography Centre to conduct systematic scientific monitoring surveys in the deep-sea Whittard Canyon and Gollum Channel

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## Summary

- Observations are made in relation to possible impacts on sea fisheries and the seafood sector.
- The application, submitted by National Oceanography Centre, Southampton, UK, is to conduct systematic scientific monitoring surveys in the areas of the Whittard Canyon and Gollum Channel to the south west of Ireland (262 km south-south-west of Mizen Head, County Cork and 108 km south-west of Dursey Island, County Cork respectively) and inside the Irish EEZ.
- The shallower regions (approx. <400m) of the proposed Whittard Canyon and Gollum Channel operations are coincidental with fishing activities: bottom otter trawls, pelagic trawls – Irish and international and international long lines, gillnets and seines<sup>1</sup>.
- Areas overlap hake, horse mackerel, mackerel, megrim and monkfish nursery and spawning grounds.
- Considering the short nature of the proposed operations, they should not interfere with fishing activities, assuming any necessary Marine Notices are made and exact location of the moorings are published after deployment, or fish ecology/biology<sup>1</sup>.
- Potential for cumulative impacts should be considered in relation to similar/other activities taking place in close proximity – temporal and spatial.
- Survey dates are proposed from 26<sup>th</sup> June to 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2026 onboard the *RRS James Cook*, with a licence request from June 2026 to December 2027 to accommodate potential vessel schedule changes and recovery of moorings deployed in 2026.
- Activities comprise deployment of oceanographic moorings (to be recovered approx. 12 months later), seafloor and water column surveys (including 4 week-long deployment of a subsurface autonomous glider, several up to 30 hour-long deployments of an AUV) and sediment sampling.
- Activities as part of a scientific research project funded by the United Kingdom's Natural Environment Research Council (NERC).
- The purpose is for characterisation of the transport of natural particles, nutrients, organic carbon and pollutants from the continental shelf to the deep-sea and provide more detailed environmental characterisation in key deep-sea sites in Irish waters.
- Activities are aligned with UN Sustainable Development Goal 14 (Life Below Water) and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD; EU Directive 2008/56/EC) and Commission Decision (ED) 2017/848 which underpins implementation of Ireland's MSFD, aiming to determine, achieve and maintain Good Environmental Status (GES).
- Collaborating organisations: University of East Anglia (UK), Scottish Association of Marine Science (SAMS), University College Cork (Ireland), University of Galway (Ireland), National Parks and Wildlife Service (Ireland), Manchester University (UK) and University of Southampton (UK), Royal Netherlands Institute for Sea Research (Netherlands), University of Brest (France), Spanish National Research Council, (Spain).

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<sup>1</sup> (2014 – 2018; Ireland's Marine Atlas: <https://atlas.marine.ie>)