



March 26, 2026

licence@mara.gov.ie

RE: Maritime Usage Licence Applications - MUL250016

A Chara,

The Marine Divisions of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) welcome the opportunity to provide comments on Marine Usage Licence application - MUL250016. The application requests permission to undertake the harvesting of seaweed, *Ascophyllum nodosum* and *Fucus vesiculosus*, from the intertidal zone of Mace Head, Co. Galway.

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 harvesting of seaweed is being evaluated.

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.

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.

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

The MI note that due to the littoral distribution of *A. nodosum* and *Fucus* spp. the impact on fish ecology, fishing activities and aquaculture is likely to be minimal. However, potential impacts to the intertidal habitat and productivity of targeted seaweed species should be evaluated, and cumulative impacts of similar activities being undertaken in similar times and spatial ranges should also be considered.

BIM recommend that the proposed activity needs to be consistent with other existing seafood activity. Demonstrating compliance with sustainable management and best practice is considered important. Early and continuous communication should be made with stakeholders in the proposed mapped areas to avoid any conflicts arising with fishers and aquaculture operators in the areas regarding proposed activities.

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DAFM advises that aquaculture installations are located throughout the proposed MUL area, including shellfish, finfish, and seaweed cultivation. Sites are present within the foreshore, intertidal zone, and sublittoral zone.

DAFM notes the applicant is aware of this in the Assessments of Impacts of the Maritime Usage Report.

Aquaculture licensing is a live process and the most up to date license information should be consulted prior to the commencement of harvesting activities. All efforts should be made to consult with aquaculture operators in the vicinity of proposed harvesting activities.

DAFM advises that the impact on aquaculture operations is expected to be minor and short-term with no significant adverse effects anticipated. Potential impacts on water quality are considered negligible, as these activities have been undertaken simultaneously throughout the region.

To minimise any potential disturbance, DAFM recommends a buffer zone of 200m to be established around all aquaculture installations and that care is to be taken within shared access routes to all sites.

These measures ensure a precautionary approach to safeguarding water quality and operational space.

DAFM recognises that the developer's aim is to promote co-existence and minimise potential disruption to commercial fishing activities in the area. The evaluation of potential impacts of harvesting of seaweed, 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 development activity should incorporate the principle of maximising coexistence with established activities in marine areas.

As set out in the AIMU report, the proposed Maritime Usage Licence (MUL) area either overlaps with or is adjacent to several fisheries including pot fishing (targeting lobster and shrimp), net fishing (primarily for bait) and line fishing (for pollock and mackerel) which occurs in deeper waters south of Mace Head. It also noted that, as harvesting activities will avoid direct overlap with commercial fisheries, any impact on fisheries or aquaculture installations is expected to be minor and short-term.

It is important to be aware that 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/>
- West Regional Inshore Fisheries Forum (WRIFF):
<https://inshoreforums.ie/west-overview/>

Please also find attached documents from the MI, MED and BIM which provide further comments for consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Marine Divisions
An Roinn Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine