

MUL260022 - Fingal County Council

Proposed activity:

MARA MUL260022 application submitted by Fingal County Council (FCC). FCC propose to undertake maintenance dredging in Balbriggan harbour to remove sediment build up and debris, clean the basin and maintain accessibility for fishing vessels at lower tidal levels at Balbriggan Harbour, Co Dublin.

BIM Comments:

08.05.2026

The proposed maintenance dredging at Balbriggan Harbour is a necessary and broadly supported measure. The application seeks permission to remove 8,000–10,000 cubic metres of sediment over the duration of the licence, reflecting the scale of accumulated material and the need to restore safe navigational depths for harbour users.

BIM acknowledge that the Natura Impact Statement show that the results of the harbour sediment samples undertaken by the Marine Institute *“indicated that the majority of samples were Class 3, exceeding the upper contaminant limits for dumping at sea; only two samples fell within Class 1 or 2 thresholds. Consequently, dumping at sea is not considered a feasible disposal option”* The report indicates that *“the majority of dredged material is suitable for disposal at licensed landside facilities, while any hazardous material will require specialist handling and treatment prior to disposal.”*

Also, the screening for assessment report also indicates that *“All dredged material will be transported to licensed landside facilities, with no dumping at sea proposed. Works are also to be undertaken during lowtide conditions, when the harbour basin is largely dewatered, thereby limiting the potential for sediment dispersion during active dredging.”*

However, there is no mention of the fisheries activity of razor classification areas and the potential impact this might have on the economically important razor fishery, which is a significant proportion of landing to the Balbriggan Harbour.

Balbriggan is located at the centre of the most productive razor clam fishery on the Irish east coast, with up to twelve locally based vessels contributing significantly to the almost €6 million annual value of the fishery. The harbour also supports vessels targeting Dublin Bay prawns, lobsters, and other demersal species, making it an important multi-species fishing port supplying fish to local consumers and supporting many ancillary jobs.

The harbour lies within the Skerries classified shellfish production area, with the Gormanstown production area immediately to the north. As illustrated in [the SFPA classified production area map](#) (Appendix 1), the Skerries area accounts for approximately 15% of all classified shellfish production area on the east coast, while Gormanstown accounts for approximately 30%. A further illustration of the distribution of razor clam grounds, taken from the [Marine Institute Shellfish Stock Book 2024](#) (Appendix 2), highlights the concentration of commercially important razor beds in this region.

Razor clams are filter-feeding bivalves, meaning they draw large volumes of water through their siphons and can accumulate contaminants present in the water column or suspended sediments. Fishing for razor clams occasionally occurs within a few hundred meters of the entrance to the harbour. Biotxin and water quality samples that influence the classification of the entire Skerries and Gormanstown classified areas can be taken from anywhere within those areas. Although the overall risk of dredging-related contamination affecting the Skerries or Gormanstown areas is considered low, the sensitivity of these species and the [regulatory framework governing classified production areas](#) make it appropriate to maintain standard precautionary measures. These include turbidity monitoring, defined stop-work thresholds, and clear communication protocols should unexpectedly changes in water quality occur.

The removal and transport of dredged material will require a significant number of truck movements over the course of the works. Given that sections of the Balbriggan quayside have experienced structural failures in the past, it would be prudent to confirm that the quay can safely accommodate heavily laden vehicles before operations begin. This is a practical engineering consideration intended to protect harbour infrastructure.

Operational coordination will also be important. Fishing activity in Balbriggan is strongly tidal, with most departures, landings, fuelling, and fish collection occurring from approximately three hours before high tide until one hour after. Ensuring that dredging and vehicle movements do not obstruct access during these windows will minimise disruption to the fleet and allow both activities to proceed safely.

It is also relevant to note that previous dredging of the harbour entrance has historically provided only short-term improvements. Due to the entrance's proximity to Balbriggan's main beach, natural coastal processes tend to move sand back into the channel, with the river's outflow often being the only feature maintaining a navigable path. While the current proposal focuses mainly on the inner harbour, the long-term management of the entrance may require a more structural solution to reduce repeated infilling and to avoid unintended impacts on the adjacent beach.

Overall, the proposed dredging is both necessary and beneficial. With proportionate safeguards, clear communication, and attention to the structural and operational characteristics of the harbour, the works can be carried out effectively and with minimal disruption to the fishing fleet or the surrounding environment.

Additional, usual channels of communication, such as Marine Notices, the Producer Organisations such as the IS&EFPO, IIMRO, NIFA, local RIFF, all the relevant harbour port offices and local authority offices, and local media including Marine Times where possible covering the impacted area.

Appendix 1

RAZOR CLAM

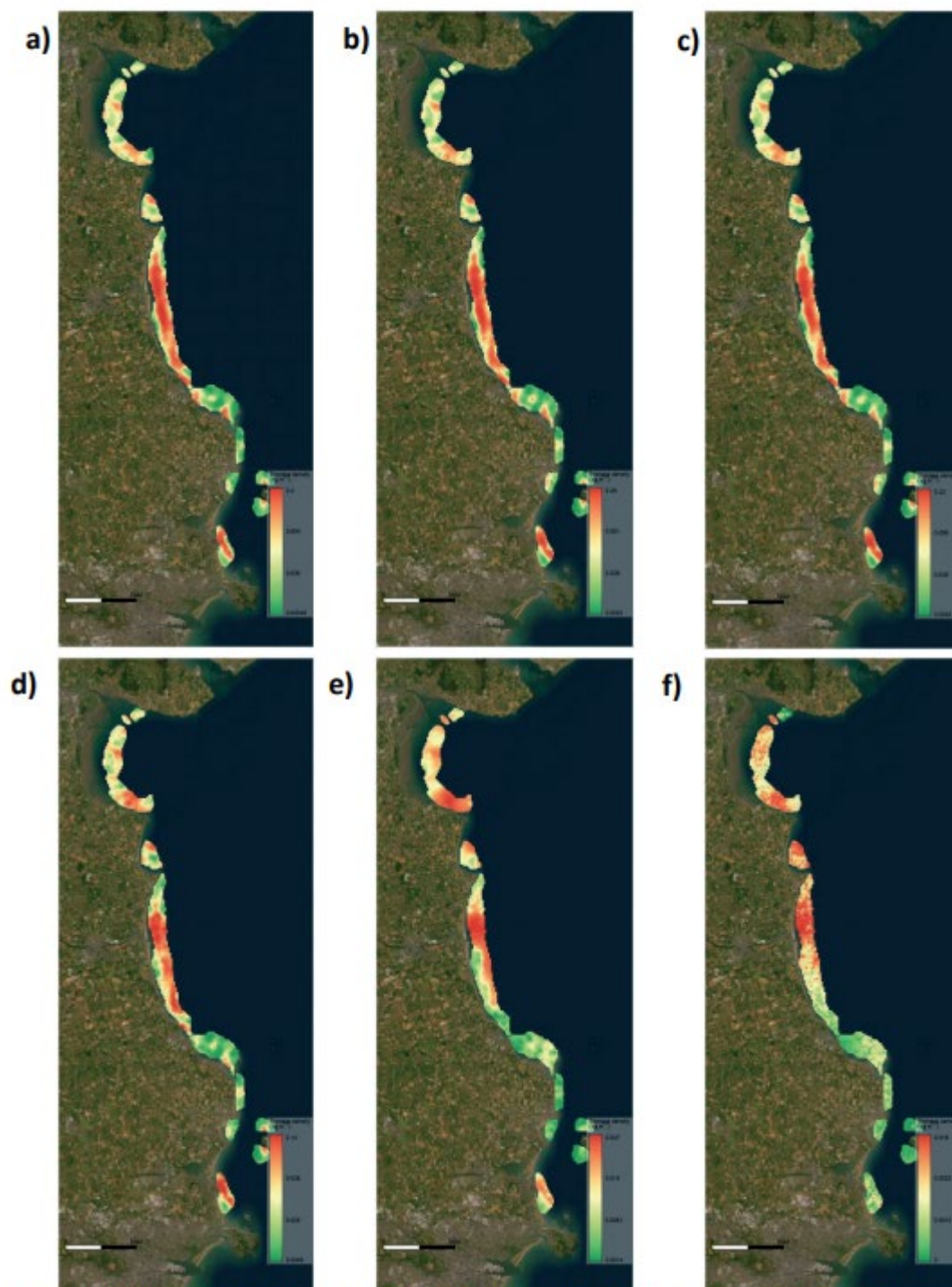
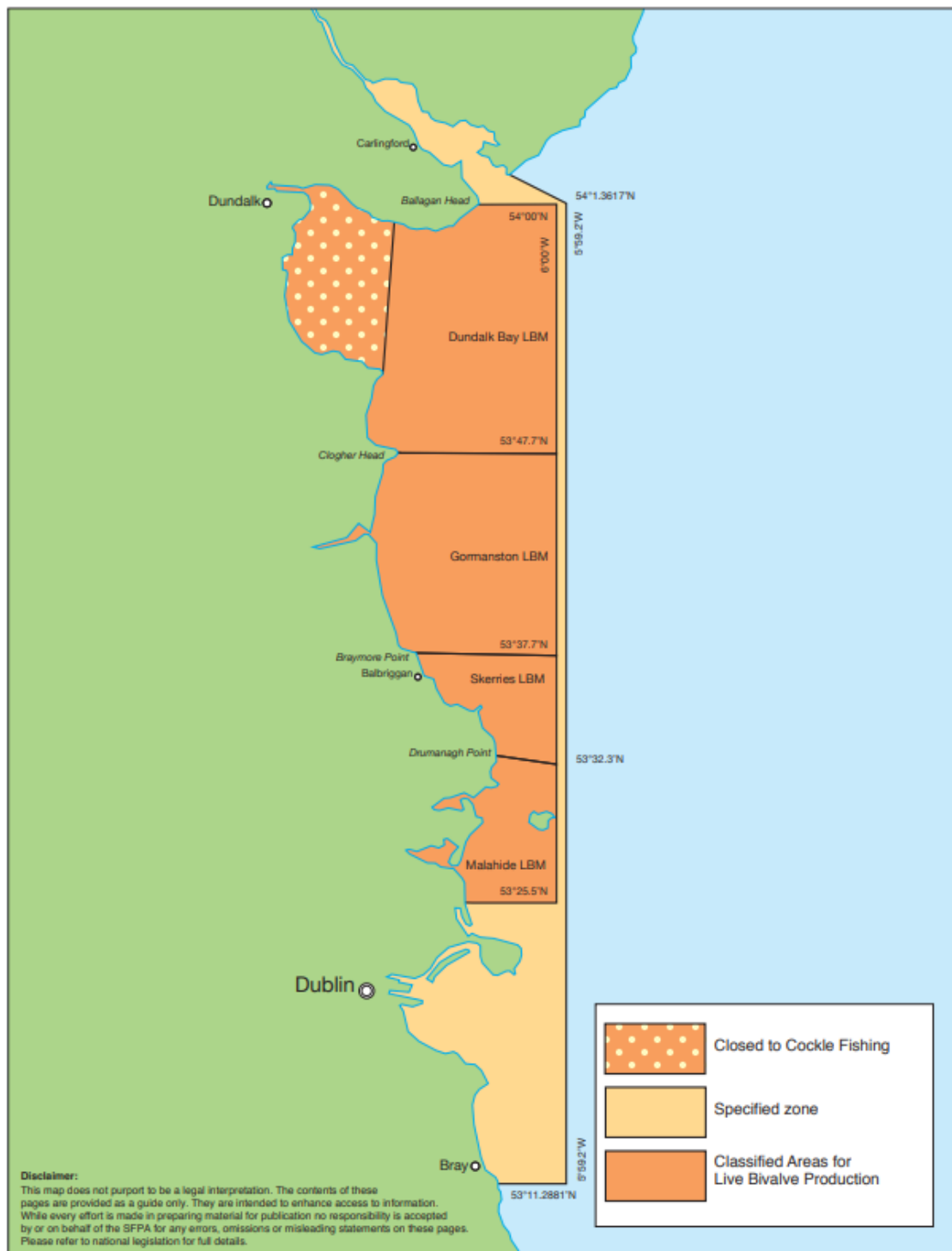


Figure 33. Distribution of *Ensis siliqua* in the North Irish Sea (including north Dundalk Bay) in June 2025 for a) all size classes, b) >130 mm, c) >140 mm, d) >160 mm, e) >180 mm, and f) >200 mm.

Appendix 2



Live Bivalve Mollusc Classification production areas along the East coast from Malahide up to Dundalk Bay.