

MI Observations on MUL260021 – DCEE- Geophysical, geotechnical, metocean and biological surveys in the South Coast DMAP

Marine Institute – 24/04/2026

Summary

The Seafood Climate Unit of DAFM requested MI observations on possible impacts that Marine Usage Licence ref: MUL260021 might have on the seafood sector, i.e. fish stocks, fisheries, aquaculture, or the environments on which they rely. The application submitted by Department of Environment, Climate and Communications in application for a maritime usage license to conduct geophysical, geotechnical, metocean and biological surveys in the South Coast DMAP to inform future offshore renewable energy development. The licence request is a multiannual licence covering a 5-year period commencing in Q3 2026.

Key Observations:

- The current MUL licence includes a greater scope of works than previously granted (LIC24006)
- The degree of potential impacts to fisheries and fishery resources relates to timing of survey operations and the equipment used. With the impact of displacement relating to timing of survey activities key to minimising impact.
- Geotechnical operations specifically cone penetration test and boreholes works are highlighted as causing potential negative effects on benthic crustaceans (Crab and Lobster) and subsequently reduced catch rates.
- Previous observations made under LIC24006 identified where feasible, the use of the sparker instead of the airgun is recommended, along with the application of additional mitigation measures during survey activities (bubble curtains).
- Of those impacts highlighted these would be spatially and temporarily discrete with limited potential for long term impact.
- Survey plans and engagement with the Seafood/ORE working group by DECC is required to ensure sufficient engagement and notice to fishing industry.

Observations

A previous licence was granted by MARA (LIC240006) for undertaking geophysical surveys in the South-Coast DMAP area. The current MUL licence includes a greater scope of works than previously granted, including but not limited to geotechnical cone penetration testing and boreholes. With the outlined works having potential different impacts to fisheries and fishery resources. It would be expected that **impacts to fishers/fisheries would be spatially and temporarily discrete with limited potential for long term impact.**

While the proposed survey areas do coincide with fishing areas, fish stocks or aquaculture activities, independently the survey operations should not substantially interfere with fishing activities. It is assumed that necessary notices to mariners / fishing vessels will be made regarding operations and placement of Metocean Bouts.

The indicated areas are coincidental with spawning and nursery grounds of a range of commercial fish species, including:

Cod Nursery Ground ; Haddock Spawning Ground; Herring Spawning Grounds and Nursery Grounds; Horse Mackerel Nursery Ground; Mackerel Nursery Ground; Whiting Nursery and Spawning Grounds.

