

Eastern IFCA Enforcement Policy – Regulation 8: Mussels (*Mytilus edulis*) minimum size

Wash Fishery Order (1992) Mussel Relaying Fishery 2019



Date Agreed: 13th March 2019

Regulation 8 of the Wash Fishery Order 1992 (WFO) prohibits the removal of mussels less than 45mm in length from within the WFO.

Mussel relaying fisheries target juvenile mussels for the purpose of ‘relaying’ the mussel onto beds allocated for private aquaculture. The majority of mussel removed from the wild beds for this purpose are relayed within WFO Shellfish Lays within The Wash.

The mussel relaying fishery is an established practice and is guided by associated policies which ensure the sustainability of the mussel fishery.

Policy

Eastern IFCA will not take enforcement action against fishers licenced to fish within the WFO Mussel Relaying Fishery 2019 with regards to non-compliance with Regulation 8.

It is a requirement of the WFO Relaying Fishery 2019 that fishers must relay all catch taken from the fishery within the Wash and North Norfolk Coast Special Area of Conservation. Any mussel fished for, taken or removed from the fishery for any other purpose would be subject to Regulation 8 and Eastern IFCA would enforce the minimum size.

Rationale and mitigation

Eastern IFCA has enabled several mussel relaying fishers in the past and it is an established fishery. Pending the planned review of the WFO Regulations, there is no formal mechanism to grant exemption from Regulation 8 for the purpose of aquaculture cultivation (as there is for Eastern IFCA byelaws). As such, an enforcement policy is required to enable the fishery.

Mussels less than 45mm in length are unlikely to have spawned and are therefore protected from removal during a ‘normal’ fishery. Removal of pre-spawning individuals has the potential to negatively impact the sustainability of the mussel fishery. However, the annual mussel survey has indicated that the mussel stocks will not be adversely affected by a limited fishery targeting juvenile mussels. This is primarily a reflection of the high biomass of juvenile mussels. The full survey report and rationale for the opening of a ‘relaying fishery’ is set out in Action Item 6 of the Eastern IFCA Marine Protected Area Sub-committee meeting of 13th March 2019. In addition,

potential impacts on the integrity of the Wash and North Norfolk Coast Special Area of Conservation have been assessed and found to be not significant.

Potential impacts on the mussel stocks are mitigated primarily through the implementing of a Total Allowable Catch (TAC). The TAC has been set to prevent excessive removal of pre-spawning mussels to the extent that the stocks will not be significantly impacted.

Eastern IFCA will undertake engagement with the industry to ensure that fishers are aware of the policy and its limitations.