

Published 03.01.2023

*"Determination of Aquaculture licensing application –T03/071*

*River Bank Mussels Ltd., c/o Pricewaterhouse Coopers, Cornmarket, Wexford has applied for authorisation for the bottom cultivation of mussels on the foreshore on a 80.04 ha site (T03/071A) in Wexford Harbour, Co. Wexford.*

*The Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine has determined that it is in public interest to grant a variation of the licence sought i.e. reducing the footprint of the site from 80.04 ha to 50.8294 ha. The reason for the recommendation to reduce the footprint of the site is that the Appropriate Assessment concluded that both the existing and proposed applications for the cultivation of bottom culture mussels in Slaney River Valley SAC would impact on the Annex 1 intertidal habitat 'Mudflats and Sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide' (1140). To mitigate the impact resulting from the cultivation of bottom culture mussels, it was recommended that site T03/071A be reconfigured to exclude overlap with the aforementioned intertidal habitat (1140) within the Slaney River Valley SAC.*

*The potential interaction between aquaculture operations and the Harbour Seal was also assessed during the AA process. The reconfiguration of site T03/071A, as recommended, removes any conflict with Harbour Seal haul out areas. In making his determination the Minister considered those matters which by virtue of the Fisheries (Amendment) Act 1997, and other relevant legislation, he was required to have regard. Such matters include any submissions and observations received in accordance with the statutory provisions. The following are the reasons and considerations for the Minister's determination to grant a variation of the licence sought: -*

- a. Scientific advice is to the effect that the waters are suitable. The site is located adjacent to Wexford Harbour Shellfish Designated Waters. Mussels in these waters currently have a "B" classification;*
- b. Public access to recreational and other activities can be accommodated by this project;*
- c. The proposed development should have a positive effect on the economy of the local area;*
- d. All issues raised during Public and Statutory consultation phase;*
- e. There are no effects anticipated on the man-made environment heritage of value in the area;*
- f. No significant effects arise regarding wild fisheries;*
- g. The site is located within the Slaney River Valley SAC (Site Code: 00781), The Raven Point Nature Reserve SAC (Sited Code: 00710), Wexford Harbour and Slobs SPA (Site Code: 4076) and the Raven SPA (Site Code: 4019). An Article 6 Assessment has been carried out in relation to aquaculture activities in the SAC's/SPA's. The Licensing Authority's Conclusion Statement (available on the Department's website) outlines how aquaculture activities in these SAC's/SPA's, including this reconfigured site, are being licensed and managed so as not to significantly and adversely affect the integrity of the Slaney River Valley SAC, The Raven Point Nature Reserve SAC, Wexford Harbour and Slobs SPA and the Raven SPA.*
- h. Scientific observations related to the Appropriate Assessment received during the licencing consultation process are addressed in the Licensing Authority's Appropriate Assessment Conclusion Statement;*
- i. Taking account of the recommendations of the Appropriate Assessment the aquaculture activity at this site is consistent with the Conservation Objectives for the SAC/SPA;*

*j. No significant impacts on the marine environment and the quality status of the area will not be adversely impacted;*

*k. The updated and enhanced Aquaculture licence contain terms and conditions which reflect the environmental protection required under EU and National law."*