



**Iascach Intíre Éireann
Inland Fisheries Ireland**

Procedure for applying for and issuing of Oyster Dredge Licences.

23/09/2025

This Document outlines the procedure for Inland Fisheries Ireland for considering Oyster Dredge Applications– in Natura 2000 sites.

IFI Procedure for Issuing Oyster Dredge Licences

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Author (s):	Greg Forde				
Authorised Officer:	Mr. Francis O'Donnell, Chief Executive Officer				
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Allocation of Oyster Dredge Licences for SAC's in 2026 to ensure that no intensification of fishing activity takes place and priority habitats are protected from inappropriate dredging activity.

Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) is the public authority with responsibility for the conservation and management of Ireland's inland fisheries and sea angling resources. Part of this statutory function, through the Fisheries Acts (1959 – 2010, as amended) is the issue of licences for harvesting Oysters by dredge in a number of named coastal bays, most of which are designated as Natura 2000 (European) sites.

The qualifying interests and special conservation interests (i.e. habitats and species which are characteristic of the region and of conservation importance in a national and EU context) for which these coastal bays are designated, comprise sensitive marine organisms and their immediate environments which require conservation and protection under EU and national legislation. For this reason, all aquaculture activity (including dredging) is subject to appropriate assessment in accordance with article 6(3) of Council Directive 92/43/EEC 1992 *on the conservation of natural habitats, wild fauna and flora*, Council Directive 79/409/EEC *on the conservation of wild birds* and part 5(42) of S.I. 477/2011 - *European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations* to ensure that significant effects do not arise as a result of any licenced activity, which could negatively impact on the integrity of European sites.

Responsibility for the enforcement of the above EU and national legislation largely rests with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLG). However, as the public authority charged with the issue of licence for certain activities within Natura 2000 sites, IFI must ensure that any such licenced activity is carried out so as to secure compliance with the requirements of the Habitats Directive, the Birds Directive and the Habitats Regulations.

To ensure compliance with EU and National regulations, IFI have engaged in a process of updating the Appropriate Assessments for oyster harvest in SAC/SPA areas and in strengthening any proposed mitigations for harvest activity to ensure that the protected habitats and species in Natura 2000 sites achieve their conservation objectives. As this process progresses, IFI request that all grantees of oyster dredge licences familiarise themselves with any areas in their respective bays where certain activities (i.e. dredging) could cause harm or damage to sensitive (European) habitats, namely:

1. **Zostera-dominated community**
2. **Maerl-dominated community**
3. **Serpula vermicularis dominated community**

Maps and assessments for these habitats are available at

<https://www.fisheriesireland.ie/services/public-services/oyster-dredge-licences>

These provide details on the locations and extent of the above habitats where dredging could cause damage. Failure to adhere to the regulations requiring exclusion from these habitat areas, as outlined in the appended map, is an offense under section 35. (1)(a) of the Habitats Regulations.

IFI must also ensure that the wild oyster fisheries are managed in a sustainable manner and will continue to limit the number of licences that can be issued for 2025-2026 and subsequent years to no more than the average number of licences that had been issued for that District / area over the previous 5 years when dredging actually took place. In the future any increase in the number of licences issued will be related to the sustainable exploitation of an increase in oyster biomass in the fishery. Until such a biomass increase is demonstrated the current restrictions on licence numbers will continue to apply.

The number of licences issued in the previous 5 years when the fishery was actively fished has been determined for all relevant Fishery Districts and are used to identify the number of licences that can be issued.

Over the last number of years, it has been necessary to introduce this system as an interim measure to enable IFI manage the fishery sustainably provide for the issuing of oyster licence applications nationally.

Procedure for Oyster Dredge Licence Applications

There is a need to create an application timeframe for oyster licence applications. i.e. applications are invited from oyster fishers seeking a licence to operate an Oyster Dredge for the **2026** season. Applications will only be accepted from applicants with boats on the sea fishing boat register of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. Applicants must complete **Appendix 1** of the **Oyster Dredge Licence Application Form**. Please note that application forms are also available online at:

<https://www.fisheriesireland.ie/services/public-services/oyster-dredge-licences>

or from any district office of Inland Fisheries Ireland (please refer to Appendix 2 for a list of IFI District Offices).

All applications must be submitted on the required IFI form and must be completed in full. The closing date for receipt of Oyster Dredge Licence Applications for the **2026** season is **Monday 1st of December 2025 before 12.00 noon**. Applications should be addressed to the relevant IFI office and should state the Fishery District for which the application is being sought. No late applications can be considered except in the case where the initial applications and licences issued are less than the number available or issued.

An advertisement shall be published on the IFI website and in a National Newspaper stating the reasons for the conservation measures both in terms of effort and yield and why no intensification of the fishery can be permitted.

Applications for Oyster Dredge Licences shall be date stamped and numbered on arrival/opening and acknowledged in writing by the appropriate office.

The licence application shall be clearly marked on receipt by the relevant Inland Fisheries Ireland office in relation to which Fishery District it is in respect of.

If the Oyster Dredge Licence application is in respect of an area that includes a Natura 2000 site IFI must ensure that the fishery and the Natura site is properly managed and the priority habitats are appropriately protected – to this end certain priority habitat areas will be closed to dredging. In addition 'oyster' is also listed by the NPWS as a characterising species of sedimentary habitats or is listed as a specific habitat in its own right and to which specific conservation objectives apply thus IFI must ensure that this habitat is not overexploited. Consequently, certain restrictions will continue to apply until management plans ensure that the stock is sustainably exploited.

Applications will only be accepted from legitimate oyster fishers with the necessary equipment – boat and dredge – to undertake the activity. Both the boat and dredge shall be inspected in advance of the licence being issued. Legitimate oyster fishers are required to provide written proof of having fished for oysters in the previous year / past. (e.g. evidence of the sale of oysters etc.).

It is also important to try and ensure that only established fishers are issued with licences and no new entrants are permitted to the detriment of established fishers.

All licence holders must ensure that the name of the owner of the dredge is clearly identified on the dredge (in welded writing) and the licence is in the name of the owner.

Following initial assessment of the applications, licences should be initially allocated as follows:

Applications will not be accepted from fishers with a conviction for fisheries offences in the previous two years.

Category 1:

Licences to be allocated (subject to boat and dredge inspection) in the first instance, to established fishers with boats on the sea fishing boat register of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine who held an oyster dredge licence in 2025 and each of the four previous years in which the fishery was open for fishing and actively fished.

Category 2:

Licences to be allocated (subject to boat and dredge inspection) to established fishers with boats on the sea fishing boat register of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine who held a licence in 2025 and three of the previous 5 years in which the fishery was open for fishing and actively fished.

Category 3:

Licences to be allocated (subject to boat and dredge inspection) to established fishers with boats on the sea fishing boat register of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine who held a licence in four of the last 5 years in which the fishery was open for fishing and actively fished.

Category 4:

Licences to be allocated (subject to boat and dredge inspection) to established fishers with boats on the sea fishing boat register of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine who held a licence in three of the last 5 years in which the fishery was open for fishing and actively fished.

Category 5:

Licences to be allocated (subject to boat and dredge inspection) to established fishers with boats on the sea fishing boat register of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine who held a licence in two of the last 5 years in which the fishery was open for fishing and actively fished.

Category 6:

Licences to be allocated (subject to boat and dredge inspection) to established fishermen with boats on the sea fishing boat register of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine who held a licence in one of the last 5 years in which the fishery was open for fishing and actively fished.

Category 7: - On a pilot trial basis for 2019, 2020, 2021,2022, 2023,2024,2025, 2026

New applicant first degree relative (spouse; brother; sister; son; daughter or parent only) Licences to be allocated (subject to boat and dredge inspection) to established fishers (but not previous oyster licence holders) with boats on the sea fishing boat

register of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine who did not hold a licence in person but is a first degree relative of a current fisher who is prepared to retire from the fishery but maintain the tradition in the family these cases may be considered under Category 7. First degree relatives will be considered on a priority basis similar to categories 1 – 6 above. A history of fishing with the retiring relative may also be taken into consideration if an appropriate declaration is made and signed.

The retiring relative provision may require certain documentary proof in the form of birth certificates, photographic ID of both parties and, if necessary, utility bills etc.

Category 8:

New applicants – with boats on the sea fishing boat register of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine these will be placed on a waiting list as the issuing of licences to new entrants may be considered when the stock in the fishery recovers to such a degree that it can be sustainably exploited by a greater number of licensed dredges and still afford a reasonable return to the fishers.

Category	Most recent year	Additional track record provision	Reference period
1	2025	And each of previous 4 years	2025 and 2021-2024
2	2025	And 3 of previous 5 years	2025 and 2021-2024
3	N/A	4 of previous 5 years	2021-2025
4	N/A	3 of previous 5 years	2021-2025
5	N/A	2 of previous 5 years	2021-2025
6	N/A	1 of previous 5 years	2021-2025
7	N/A	First degree relative of retiring licence holder.	2019-2025
8	N/A	New entrant	N/A

Exceptional Hardship Cases:

Where it is considered by IFI that a particular hardship case exists whereby an established fisher was precluded from fishing and taking out a licence for a number of years due to certified illness – an exception may be considered by the District Director in whose area the application is made or by the Head of Operations on appeal.

The applicant in this case must provide the necessary documentary proof required for the case to be fully considered. If it is deemed that – had the applicant been able to take out licences and fish then they would have done so, the District Director may, following an assessment of the case, (subject to boat and dredge inspection), allocate the applicant to a category under the Hardship Case.

This Hardship Case allocation will be allocated under one of the Categories 1 – 8 – the category allocated should be the closest the Director believes to what would have been the case had the applicant been able to take out a licence. – These cases are for extreme hardship and should only be allocated where a genuine case clearly exists and the necessary proofs have been provided.

Appeals Process:

Where an applicant believes his / her application has not been properly allocated into the correct category or where the applicant wishes to appeal a decision an appeals process has been established.

The appeals process is as follows:

An applicant who wishes his / her application decision to be revisited must write to the Appeals Officer **within two weeks of receipt of the letter of the decision in respect of the licence application** stating that they wish to appeal the decision in respect of their application. An administration fee of **€80** applies in this case which is only refundable in the event that the appeal is successful. They must state the grounds under which the appeal is made. (Incorrect classification of their application; non-availability of the boat and dredge for inspection when required), hardship case in which inadequate documentation was provided etc. No-one can make an appeal until after the initial decision on their application has been made.

The Appellant must state in the appeal the full grounds for seeking an appeal of the decision. All information that would be necessary to substantiate the facts of the appeal must be provided in the appeal. If the appellant wishes to rely on evidence of a genuine illness as part of the grounds for the appeal, the appellant will be expected to sign consent for IFI to seek written confirmation on a confidential basis from the appropriate Medical Doctor.

The Appeals Officer will assess the appeal and make a determination as to the merit of the appeal within **1 calendar month** of receipt of a legitimate appeal. If the appeal is deemed to be reasonable and allowed then a licence may be allocated under the Category (1 – 8) as determined by the Appeals Officer. (It may also be possible that no further licences are available, however, the finding will stand in the event of a subsequent application the following year.) If the appeal is deemed to be unsuccessful the Appeals Officer advises the appellant of the reasons for the appeal being declined. If an extension of time is required the Appeals Officer shall advise the applicant in writing. The determination by the Appeals Officer of Inland Fisheries Ireland is final.

(Definition: “Established Fishers”: These are fishers who can prove that they derive a significant proportion of their income from fishing and who have the capability and necessary resources to undertake oyster dredge fishing and a proven record as an oyster fisher and have a sea fishing boat on the register of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine).

No licence will be issued until such time as the applicant who has initially been deemed appropriate for receipt of a licence presents themselves with their appropriately licensed boat and dredge to a nominated Inspector of IFI. Once the boat and dredge have been inspected and the applicant is approved for receipt of the licence, the licence can be issued. The licence shall only be issued to the licence holder by a member of IFI staff for the specific boat in question which has been verified as having the appropriate dredge present – There is no provision in the legislation or on the licence for a nominee.

The application form is as per Appendix 1 – for an application to be valid, it must be accompanied by the appropriate fee. In the event that a licence is declined the licence fee shall be refunded in full.

The contacts for the Applications and Appeals Procedure are as per Appendix 2.

Appendix 1
Oyster Dredge Licence Application Form- 2026



Iascach Iníre Éireann
Inland Fisheries Ireland

Name of Applicant:

(Block Capitals)

Home Address:

(Block Capitals)

Name of Co-operative Society of which the applicant is a member [\(if applicable\)](#) (see end note) *

Membership number (if any):

Phone No:

Declaration that applicant derives a significant portion of his/her livelihood mainly from fishing:

Yes

No

Details of Boat:

Name

Length

Colour

Registration Number

Details of Oyster Dredge equipment:

Signature of Applicant:

Date:

Licence price for 2026 Oyster Dredge Licence is €94

All applicants must contact the local IFI office to have their boat and dredge inspected.*

Note – Oyster fishing licences will only be issued to persons who are either:

1. Members of Co-operative Societies which are engaged in the development and protection of oysters, or
2. Persons who derive their livelihoods mainly from fishing.

Written proof of having fished for oysters in the previous year should be submitted with all applications. (e.g. evidence of the sale of oysters etc.).

Appendix 2
Names and Addresses of River Basin District Offices and Directors

Inland Fisheries Ireland – Dublin
(Eastern River Basin District)
Director – Ronan Matson
Inland Fisheries Ireland
3044 Lake Drive,
Citywest Business Campus
Dublin 24
D24 Y265
Telephone: (01) 8842600

Inland Fisheries Ireland – Clonmel
(South Eastern River Basin District)
Director – Lynda Connor
Anglesea Street
Clonmel
Co. Tipperary
E91 RD25
Telephone: (052) 6180055

Inland Fisheries Ireland – Macroom
(South Western River Basin District)
Director – Sean Long
Sunnyside House
Macroom
Co. Cork
P12 X602
Telephone (026) 41222

Inland Fisheries Ireland – Limerick
(Shannon River Basin District)
Director – David McInerney
Ashbourne Business Park
Dock Road
Limerick
V94 NPEO
Telephone: (061) 300238

Inland Fisheries Ireland – Galway
(Western River Basin District - Galway)
Director – Rachel Cooper
Teach Breac
Earl's Island
Galway
H91 E2A2
Telephone: (091) 563118

Inland Fisheries Ireland –Ballina
(Western River Basin District - Ballina)
Director – Mary Walsh
Ardnaree House
Abbey Street
Ballina
Co. Mayo
F26 K029
Telephone: (096) 22788

Inland Fisheries Ireland – Ballyshannon
(North Western River Basin District)
Acting Director – Owen Kelly
Station Road
Ballyshannon
Co. Donegal
F94 WV76
Telephone: (071) 9851435

Other relevant contacts:

Appeals Officer:

Milton Matthews
Acting Head of Operations
Inland Fisheries Ireland
Station Road
Ballyshannon
Co. Donegal
F94 WV76
Telephone: (071) 9851435