

Renewing the Menai Strait East Fishery Order: Update, January 2018

Background

The eastern Menai Strait is the most important aquaculture site in all of Wales, and the single largest mussel farming area in the whole of the UK. The success of this area is due to the unique natural environment that is perfect for mussels; and also the legal protection (known as a “Fishery Order”) that allows local mussel farmers to cultivate mussels here without the fear that they will be stolen by others.

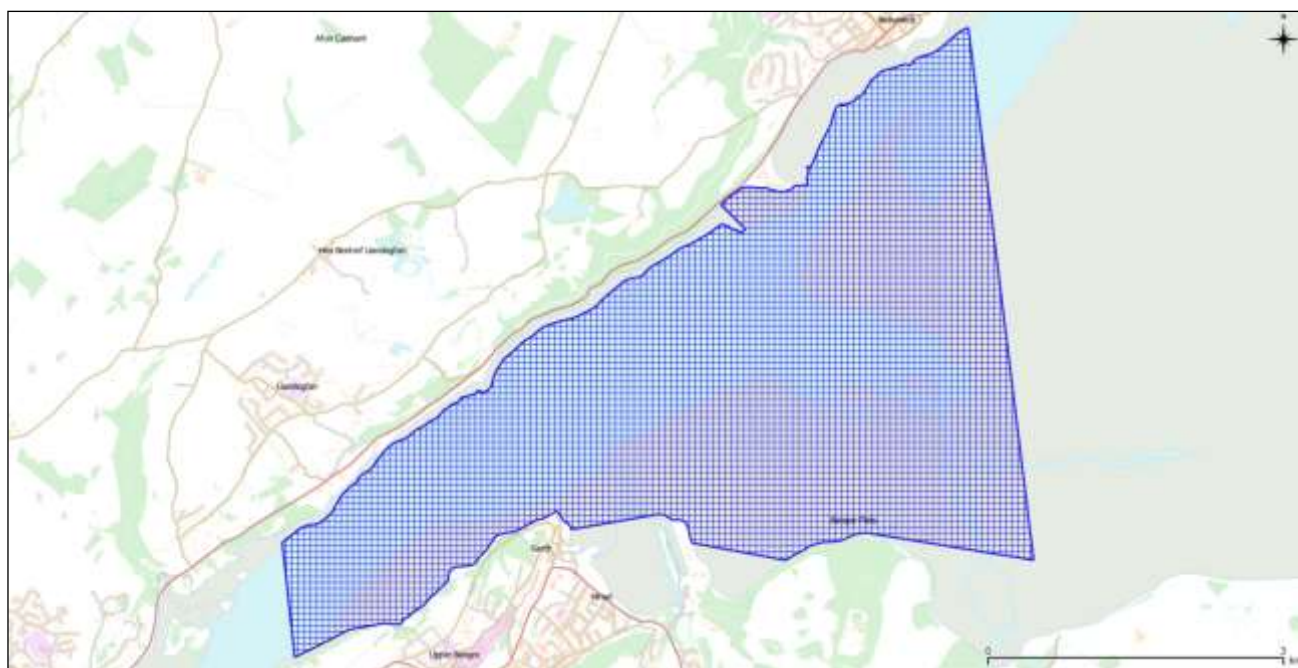
In 2022 the “Fishery Order” that the Government made in 1962 is due to expire. If it is not replaced then Wales will lose its leading place in UK aquaculture, and the local businesses and jobs that depend on the mussel fishery will vanish. The renewal of this Fishery Order is important for Wales and for the local economy.

The mussel farmers that work in the Menai Strait are now starting the process of renewing the “Fishery Order” so that in 4 years’ time new legislation will be ready to take the place of the Order that was made in 1962.

What is proposed?

We are proposing a like-for-like renewal of the existing “Fishery Order”. Experience and science tells us that areas that are suitable for mussel farming are few and far between. Over the past 55 years we have identified the best places to farm mussels in the Menai Strait. No changes to the extent of mussel farming are being proposed.

The location of the mussel farming areas in the eastern Menai Strait is shown in the map below.



What is the timetable?

We are still in the early stage of the application process. We are currently consulting with key organisations in the area and raising awareness of our plans. We are hoping to submit our formal application to the Cabinet Secretary for the renewal of this Order in early 2018.

What will happen in these areas?

Mussel farming

Mussels have been cultivated in the Menai Strait since 1962. Mussels are farmed in areas that are leased to each mussel farmer. Each farmer harvests small “seed” mussels and puts them on the shore in the sheltered waters of the Menai Strait. The mussels grow fast here, and within a couple of years they are big enough to harvest and eat. Mussel farming is done directly on the seabed – no nets or equipment are placed on the shore.

Do mussel farmers use chemicals?

No. There is no need to treat farmed mussels with chemicals to control pests. They don’t need to be fed either – they filter their food from the seawater, cleaning the water in the process. In Sweden and Denmark, mussel farming is being used to clean up polluted waters. Mussels are good for water quality.

Would there be lots of boat traffic?

No. Mussel farmers use boats, but are only on site when re-laying and harvesting mussels. Vessel operations are limited to high water periods, mainly in the autumn-spring period, and generally between Monday and Friday.

Is this sustainable?

Yes. Mussel farming in the Menai Strait has been independently certified as a sustainable fishery by the Marine Stewardship Council. In fact it was the first mussel farming area in the world to be certified as sustainable. Mussel farmers are constantly working with scientists from the Centre for Applied Marine Science to improve farming methods and ensure that the sustainability of the fishery is always improving.

Would this stop me from.....

Sailing in the area?

No. There are no restrictions on sailing over the shellfish farming areas. Work is planned to avoid key sailing events (such as races).

Walking on the beach or foreshore?

No. The Fishery Order does not restrict access to the beach or foreshore. You will still be able to walk on the shore.

Beaching a boat on the shore?

No. The Fishery Order does not prevent or interfere with beaching of boats whether for picnics or for maintenance.

Angling in the Menai Strait?

No. There would be no new restrictions on angling from the shore or from boats.

What is the Menai Strait Fishery Order Management Association?

The Menai Strait Fishery Order Management Association (MSFOMA) was set up in 2010 to oversee the management of the shellfish farming areas in the eastern Menai Strait. It is an independent not-for-profit organisation. Its membership comprises 2 representatives of the fishing industry, and 1 representative from each of Natural Resources Wales, Gwynedd County Council, Ynys Mon County Council, and the University of Bangor. It is chaired by Alan Winstone, an independent fisheries expert from Anglesey.

What is a “Fishery Order”?

In Wales, a “Fishery Order” is an Order made by the Welsh Ministers that assigns the existing public fishing rights in the sea for certain species of shellfish to an individual or organisation. A Fishery Order does not create any new fishing rights, but by privatising the fishing rights it allows for proactive management and cultivation of shellfish. The first Fishery Orders were made in the late 19th century. There are presently 24 Fishery Orders in the UK, which form the backbone of our mussel and oyster exports.

Where can I find out more?

There are several ways you can find out more about the proposal. There is some information on the internet at www.msfoma.org; and you can contact us by e-mail at info@msfoma.org. If you would prefer to talk to us in person, you can call Jim Andrews on 07908-225865.