

Agenda item B10

From: Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Officer (Science and Conservation)

To: Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority - 14th September 2026

Subject: London Gateway Approach Channel Deepening

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary

The purpose of this paper is to: (1) brief the Authority on London Gateway Port Ltd (LGPL) past projects in the Thames; (2) the current London Gateway Approach Channel Deepening Proposal; (3) summarise the relevance of the proposal to Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority's (KEIFCA) statutory duties and fisheries interests; and (4) update Members on the steps officers are taking to review the proposal, engage with stakeholders, and ensure that relevant fisheries and environmental considerations are communicated to regulators where appropriate.

Recommendation

This report is for **COMMENT** and **NOTING** only.

London Gateway Port has been undergoing phased expansion since 2010, including major capital dredging, berth construction and ongoing maintenance dredging. LGPL is now proposing a further approach channel deepening project, the "Proposed Development," involving up to 20 million m³ of dredging. The Proposed Development overlaps or is located close to important fisheries and designated Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). Officers are therefore reviewing the

proposal to ensure that potential fisheries and environmental impacts are appropriately assessed.

London Gateway Port Ltd Development History

London Gateway Port Ltd (LGPL) is the operator of London Gateway Port, which has been developed in phases under marine licences issued by the Marine Management Organisation as well as a Harbour Empowerment Order (HEO) since 2008. The timeline below summarises the key stages of the port's development:

Table 1: A summary of the port's development from 2008 – ongoing.

Year	Project stage	What this means
2010 - 2014	Main construction phase	This included around 30.5 million m ³ of dredging, approximately 93 ha of land reclamation, and around 1,250 m of quay construction for Berths 1, 2 and 3, alongside port infrastructure, access improvements, drainage, landscaping, mitigation and habitat compensation.
2013 - 2016	Berths 1-3 became operational	Container handling operations began at Berth 1 in 2013, and operations of Berths 2 and 3 were in place by 2016.
Post-2016	Smaller landside phases	Construction of minor onshore infrastructure and surfacing works, and additional empty container storage areas.
2021-2024	Berth 4 expansion	Berth 4, a westward extension of the terminal, added approximately 430 m of quay, a berth pocket and scour protection. Marine works were licensed by the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) in 2021, construction began in 2022, and the berth became fully operational in November 2024.
2024 onwards	Berths 5 and 6	The project has moved into the next major phase, with Berths 5 and 6 under construction. Berth 5 is expected to be complete and operational by summer 2027, with Berth 6 expected to follow by 2029/30.
Ongoing	Maintenance dredging	Ongoing maintenance dredging is required to manage siltation and maintain authorised depths within the approach channel, manoeuvring area and berths authorised by the HEO. Existing maintenance dredging forms part of the current environmental baseline and may be required more frequently following the proposed channel deepening.

KEIFCA opposed the original port development, with particular concern regarding the potential effects of capital dredging on the Dover sole fishery. In 2008, Dover sole was one of the district's most valuable fisheries, with landings of approximately 386 tonnes and a value of around £2.15 million. By 2025, landings had fallen to 36 tonnes, with a value of approximately £507,000. While this paper does not attribute that decline to any single factor, the scale of the reduction in a

historically important fishery provides important context for KEIFCA's scrutiny of the Proposed Development and reinforces the need for robust assessment of cumulative effects on fisheries.

Proposed Channel Deepening Project

LGPL are proposing the deepening of three approach channels; Yantlet Channel (including the Manoeuvring Area in front of the Port), Knock John Channel and the Sunk (see figure 1), to allow for larger container vessels, with draughts of up to 17.4 m, to access the port. As the proposed deepening extends beyond the dredging depths authorised under the HEO and involves disposal of dredged material at sea, additional consents and licences are required before the work can proceed.

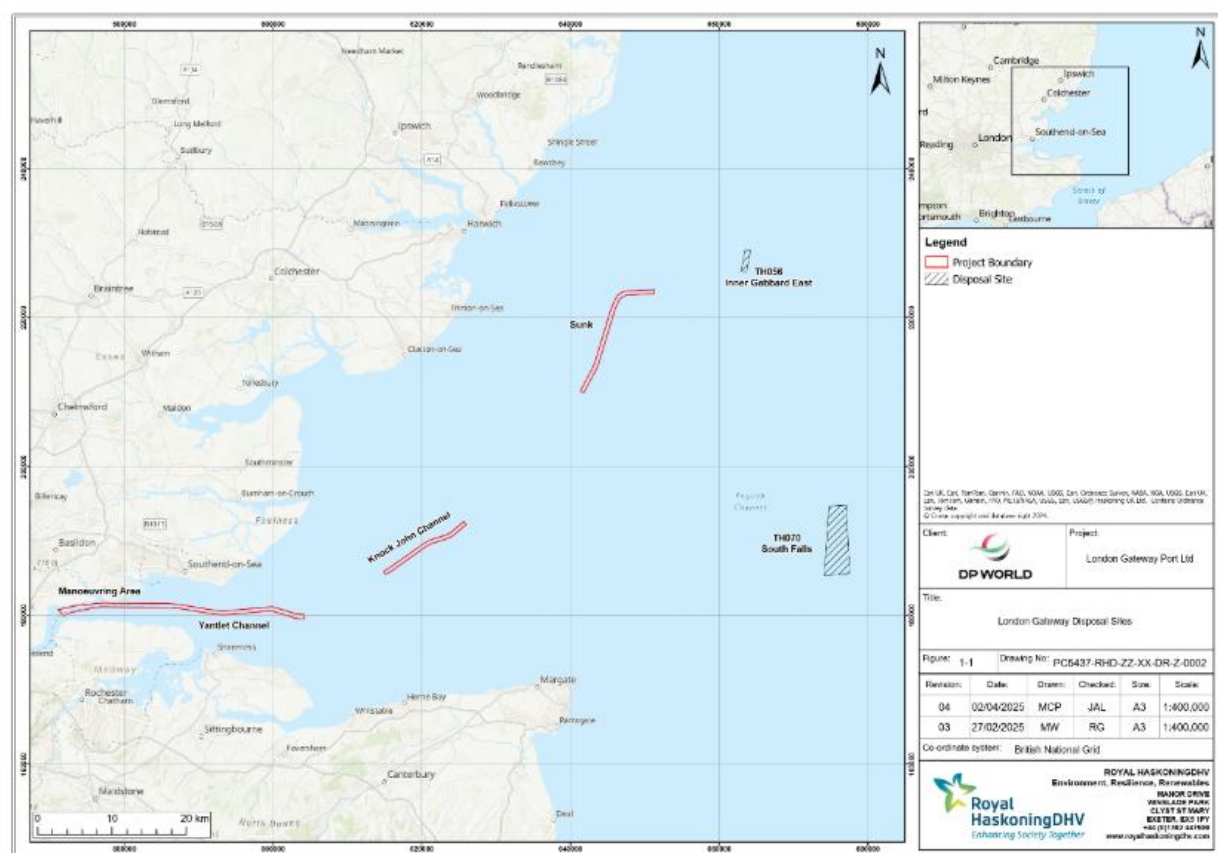


Figure 1: London Gateway Approach Channels and Disposal Sites – taken from LGPL Channel Deepening EIA Scoping Report.

The project will dredge a maximum of 20 million m³ of material over an approximately 18-month programme, with material expected to be disposed of at licensed offshore disposal sites including the Inner Gabbard East (TH056) and/or South Falls (TH070) (see figure 1). For context, the original capital dredge for London Gateway was approximately 30 million m³ and the material excavated during construction of the Channel Tunnel was approximately 8 million m³. Therefore this represents a major capital dredging project within the Thames Estuary, as well as in a national context.

The project is exploring the beneficial reuse of some dredged material, including bringing suitable material ashore for use as construction aggregate or for habitat creation and restoration, although the majority of material is expected to be disposed of at sea. Any future maintenance dredging arising from the proposed channel deepening would be subject to separate applications and environmental assessment requirements at the appropriate time.

Relevance to KEIFCA's Statutory Duties and Fisheries Interests

The proposed works are located within KEIFCA's district and fall partially within and adjacent to the Margate and Long Sands SAC (see figure 2) and the Outer Thames Estuary SPA (see figure 3). It also lies in close proximity to the Benfleet and Southend Marshes SPA/Ramsar site (~0.48 km), the Thames Estuary and Marshes SPA/Ramsar site (~0.5 km), the Foulness (Mid-Essex Coast Phase 5) SPA/Ramsar site (~1.2 km) and Medway Estuary MCZ Zone 1 and 2 (~3 km) .

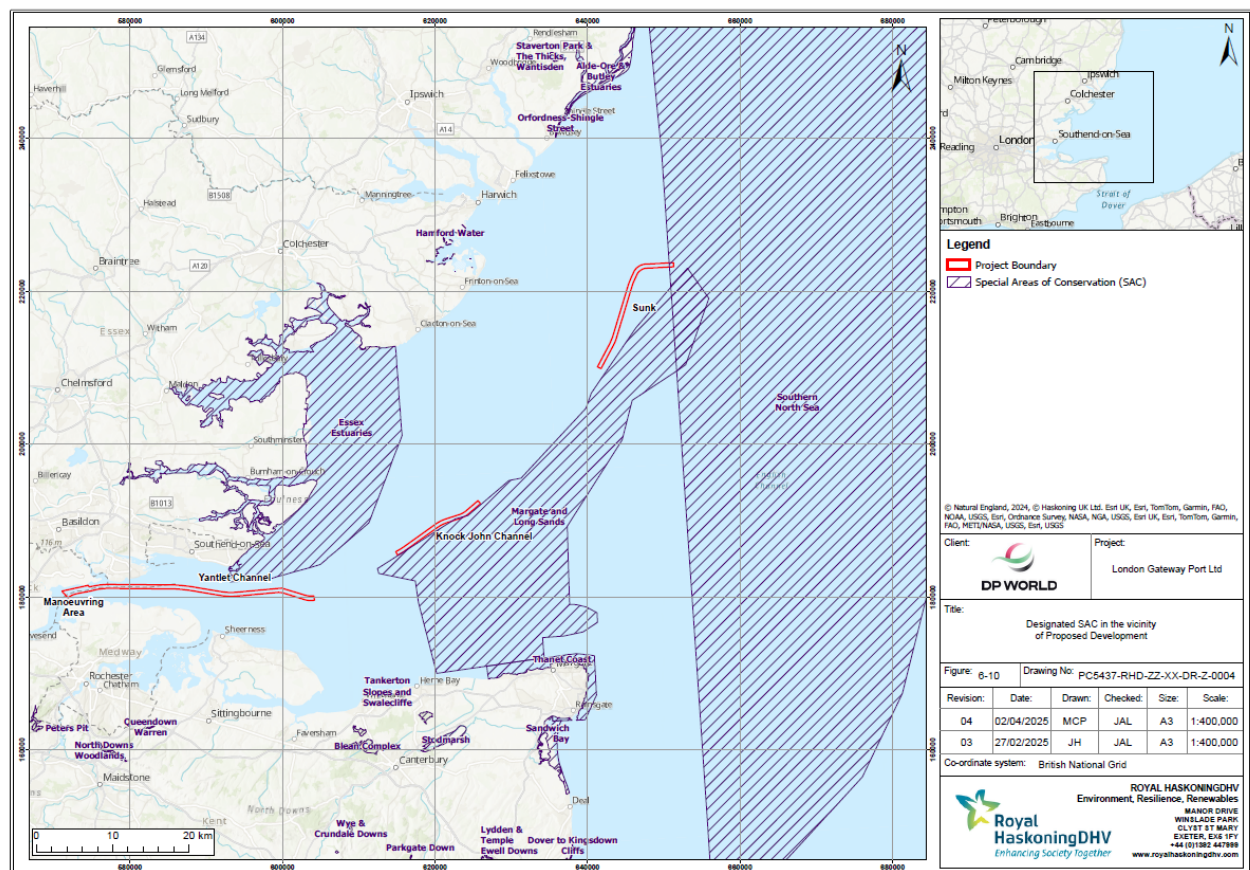


Figure 2: London Gateway Approach Channels and proximity to Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)- taken LGPL Channel Deepening EIA Scoping Report.

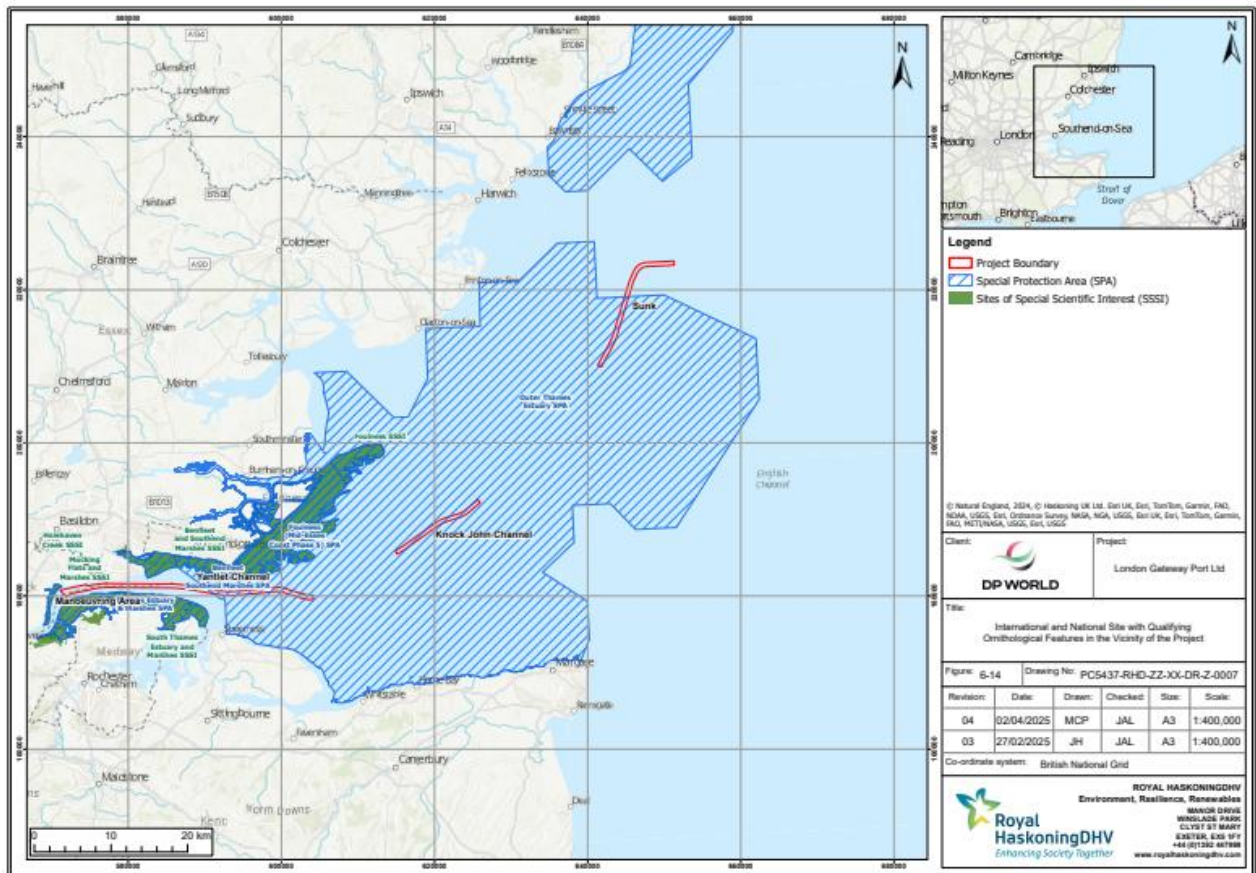


Figure 3: London Gateway Approach Channels and proximity to Special Protection Areas (SPAs)- taken LGPL Channel Deepening EIA Scoping Report.

Crucially, parts of the Yantlet Channel and Knock John Channel deepening overlap Areas 4, 9 and 11 in the Thames Estuary Cackle Fishery Order 2024 (TECFO24), close to established KEIFCA survey sites. The capital dredging will be within 200m of a stock assessment sampling site; Mouse Knob and Knob Channel.

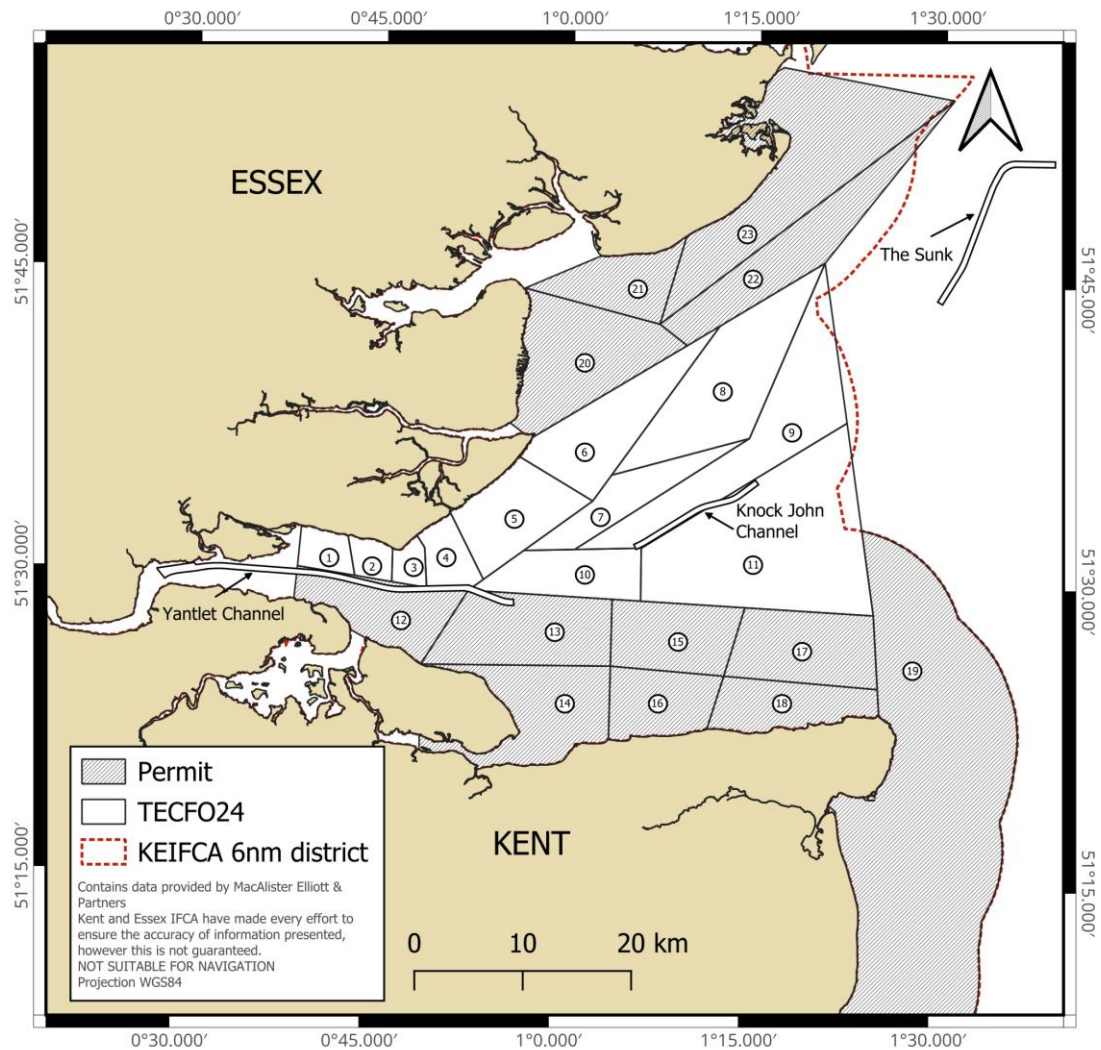


Figure 4: London Gateway Approach Channels (displayed in white) in relation to TECFO24 and Cockle Permit areas (numbered).

As the authority responsible for balancing the sustainable use of inshore fisheries with the protection of the marine environment, KEIFCA has a clear role in ensuring that potential impacts on these designated sites, the Cockle Permit Fishery, the TECFO 24 fishery and all fishing operations are appropriately assessed and considered.

The EIA Screening and Scoping Report identifies a range of marine and coastal processes, including changes to hydrodynamics, sediment transport, seabed sedimentation and dredge disposal plumes, through which capital dredging and altered bathymetry may affect marine ecology, fish and shellfish populations, and commercial fisheries (see Table 2 for a summary of the potential effects identified).

Table 2: Summary of potential effects on fisheries-relevant receptors.

Receptor	Potential effects
Marine and coastal ecology	Dredging may cause direct loss of subtidal species and habitats, sediment resuspension and dispersion and smothering of benthic communities. Longer-term hydrodynamic changes may alter erosion/accretion patterns and affect benthic communities, including effects associated with larger or deeper-draught vessels.
Fish and shellfish	Dredging and disposal may cause smothering of spawning and nursery grounds, habitat loss, increased SSC/turbidity, reduced resource availability and possible contaminant mobilisation from resuspended sediment. Underwater noise from dredging may cause behavioural effects and potential PTS/TTS onset in fish and shellfish. For migratory species identified in the baseline, migration routes and timings will be assessed against the project programme.
Commercial fisheries	Dredging may affect fish availability and catches through sediment mobilisation/turbidity, habitat loss, underwater noise and vibration. Construction and larger vessel traffic may affect fishing operations through navigational disruption, altered currents/waves and changes in fish behaviour/habitat use. Altered bathymetry and recurring maintenance dredging may cause longer-term or cumulative changes in sediment transport, turbidity, deposition and fish habitats.

LGPL proposes to support the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) with the following surveys, modelling and datasets:

- sediment sampling,
- benthic and epibenthic ecology surveys,
- bathymetric surveys,
- site-specific marine ecological surveys,
- hydrodynamic and sediment transport modelling
- underwater-noise modelling for fish and shellfish
- existing monitoring datasets, including benthic, epibenthic, intertidal, cockle and fish population data

LGPL proposes a separate Cumulative Effects Assessment (CEA) alongside the topic-based EIA assessments. The CEA will consider the Proposed Development in combination with other past, current and reasonably foreseeable plans and projects where sufficient information is available.

Existing and ongoing maintenance dredging and disposal authorised under the HEO will form part of the baseline but will also be assessed cumulatively with the Proposed Development. All EIA topics will initially be considered within the CEA, using the same assessment methodology, with topics removed only where no cumulative pathway is identified; the final scope will be agreed with the MMO.

KEIFCA response

KEIFCA considers that the current process for implementing changes under the HEO and associated licences would benefit from greater transparency and earlier direct stakeholder engagement. A recent variation to the Berths 5 & 6 dredging consent highlighted the difficulty of identifying significant changes through existing formal notification processes alone. KEIFCA has therefore requested direct notification of future licence variations and other material changes to authorised activities.

KEIFCA has since held several internal discussions and designated the Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Officer (Science and Conservation) to coordinate feedback, engage with relevant stakeholders and identify any potential issues requiring further consideration. A meeting was held in August with representatives from the MMO and Natural England (NE) to discuss KEIFCA's concerns.

The Chief Inshore Fisheries Officer, Deputy Chief Inshore Fisheries Officer, Lead Scientific and Conservation Officer and Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Officer (Science and Conservation), attended an industry meeting on 5 June, delivered by MacAlister Elliott & Partners (MEP) on behalf of LGPL. Key concerns on the proposed development included:

- Potential impacts of capital dredging and disposal activities on water quality, suspended sediments, sediment deposition, cockle beds, catch rates and the wider fisheries within the district.
- The need for a robust sediment and environmental monitoring programme, including clear arrangements for independent oversight, analysis and reporting.
- The potential for channel widening through side-slope slumping, with possible encroachment towards productive cockle grounds, noting that the proposed channel would be approximately 200 metres from the nearest cockle beds.
- Potential impacts on cockle beds and associated fisheries resources, requiring baseline surveys and ongoing monitoring before, during and after dredging activities.
- The potential for channel deepening to alter local hydrodynamics, sediment transport processes, and patterns of erosion and accretion, with consequent implications for fisheries habitats and future maintenance dredging requirements.
- Potential noise and disturbance impacts arising from dredging operations, increased vessel movements and the use of larger vessels.
- The need for greater transparency and timely access to historical environmental, sediment, monitoring and fisheries data to support effective assessment and scrutiny of the proposal.

The concerns and questions raised by fishers and KEIFCA during this process have been subsequently addressed in a formal response issued by LGPL and circulated by MEP on 16 July 2026.

KEIFCA has also since provided formal written feedback setting out concerns regarding the potential impacts of the Proposed Development on fisheries and Marine Protected Areas. This response will help inform MEP's preparation of the commercial fisheries chapter of the EIA.

KEIFCA remains particularly concerned about the timing of the proposed works, as a detailed programme for the Proposed Development has not yet been provided. Understanding when dredging and disposal activities would occur is important in determining whether there may be interactions with the operations of the TECFO24 and permit fisheries. KEIFCA also remains concerned about potential further effects on Dover sole as well as other finfish species and the need for cumulative effects on fisheries to be assessed robustly.

KEIFCA will continue to engage with LGPL, MEP, the MMO, NE and industry as the EIA/proposal progresses. Officers will review further information as it becomes available, particularly in relation to the programme of works, disposal arrangements, monitoring proposals and cumulative assessment of fisheries impacts.

Recommendation

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