

Guidance: Recovery of abandoned, lost and discarded fishing gear

The guidance should be read alongside MMO marine licence guidance for recreational divers to ensure both licence and other legislative requirements are fully understood and removals take place in a manner that minimises potential damage to the historic environment and marine species and habitats.

Competence, equipment and safety

Qualifications

All those undertaking diving operations should be sufficiently qualified with a relevant diving qualification body e.g. British Sub-Aqua Club (BSAC), the Professional Association of Dive Instructors (PADI) or 'Confédération Mondiale des Activités Subaquatiques' (CMAS).

All divers should be sufficiently qualified by their certifying organisation to the maximum depths required during the dive, including the use of gas mixes if required.

Leadership

Any removal activity should start with a clear briefing from the Project Manager ("the PM")

The dive and boat safety briefing should include all the normal information included in all dive day briefings, but must put special emphasis on site specific risks, additional risks from the planned tasks and reference a documented risk assessment highlighting the additional risks needed to be considered when removing fishing gear, e.g. entanglement. The briefing should cover:

- the objectives of the day and what each team will be doing
- the location of the dive site
- the location and type of fishing gear to be removed, determined from the survey
- special equipment required to remove the fishing gear
- consideration for less experienced divers and how these divers will be managed
- specific hazards likely to be encountered and how to manage the risks

All team members should attend this briefing. All project members should follow the instructions of the boat skipper or the PM.

Teams

Teams should conduct pre-dive checks as recommended by their diving organisation before entering the water. These checks should include checks on any additional or special equipment needed for the retrieval, e.g. gas

cylinders for lifting bags

The team must have a pre-agreed signal to halt any lifting or cutting operation, and a range of appropriate signals for likely actions during a retrieval.

Divers should ensure that their equipment is streamlined and that any potential entanglement points are removed.

Any inexperienced team members should be mentored before undertaking more complex retrieval operations.

Safety and lifting

Divers must not dive alone. The team members should work together to cut any entanglements and attach the lifting bags, but after this is complete, distinct pre-planned roles should be observed.

It is a critical safety aspect that only one team works on a particular piece of ALDFG at a time. Further to that, once gas is present in the lifting bags, only one diver should be involved in any further cutting or gas addition tasks.

Each team should have one diver who has the role of safety observer during the lifting phase and is not involved in the lifting work itself.

The team should have a pre-agreed signal to halt any lifting or cutting operation. This can take the form of light signal, a touch signal, or any other appropriate method. This signal can be given by any member of the team, resulting in an immediate cessation of the activity until the situation allows a resumption of the task.

Divers should carry sufficient additional gas for the use of lift bags. If using their breathing gas supply, use of this for inflation should be limited to shallow recoveries and small bags <20kg. For deeper recoveries and larger bags, an independent gas source should be used.

If the depth and time of the operation is enough that decompression stops are required, these should be pre-planned with a contingency plan, as per agency guidelines.

Removal

General principles

Divers engaged in recovery of ALDFG should respect the environment in which they are working at all times.

Divers should have a clear plan of where they intend to recover ALDFG by conducting survey dive(s) to work out how much and what type of litter is to be removed. Survey information should be used to generate plans that minimise impact to natural features, wildlife, archaeological remains or other objects

of cultural importance. More broadly, divers are encouraged to use their awareness of local endangered or sensitive species to avoid unnecessary disruption to their habitat (for instance, where the 'snagged' item is colonised at its base, it may be less-disruptive to cut above the area where species are present).

Smaller, low risk objects may be removed during the survey dive leaving larger items that require pre-planning for subsequent dives.

Divers should never interfere with active fishing gear. Removal or damage to such objects is strictly prohibited.

When ALDFG is being recovered, divers should endeavour to free any living organisms caught in the gear before it is removed, within the boundaries of the law regarding protected species. If this is not possible, then they should be returned to the water as soon as possible.

Dealing with entanglement

Natural features and living organisms

If an item of ALDFG is entangled in a natural feature such as rocks, reefs or other living organisms such as kelp, then the ALDFG should be cut free of the feature using suitable cutting implements. When cutting the ALDFG clear, forces applied to the features should be kept to a minimum to avoid damage.

During the lift, great care should be taken to ensure that no damage is done to the feature. This is achieved by adding sufficient gas to apply tension to the lifting bag straps, and a small amount of the ALDFG object, but not so much gas as to result in damage or disturbance to the natural feature or living organisms.

Whilst working on the ALDFG it is important to maintain good buoyancy control and to be aware of fins and dangling equipment that could inadvertently cause damage.

Wrecks

If an item of ALDFG is entangled in the wreck of a ship, aircraft or other manmade structure, then the ALDFG should be cut free of the structure using suitable cutting implements. It is important to remember that all military aircraft are protected places under the Protection of Military Remains act 1986.

When cutting the ALDFG clear, no force should be applied to the wreck to avoid damage. It should be possible to do this by following the best practice principles of a diving lift (i.e. using a small amount of lifting bag inflation to gain initial tension, cutting the item at the base of where it is snagged and using additional lifting capacity to remove the item).

When conducting removals, great care should be taken to ensure that no damage occurs. Buried gear should simply be cut free; digging of the seabed to identify the source of the gear is not recommended, as sediment disturbance

can impair visibility.

No part of the wreck or structure itself should be removed to the surface. It is not necessary to notify the receiver of wreck about the removal of ALDFG from a wreck unless the removal includes ALDFG from the wreck of a fishing vessel. In such instances details of the materials removed should be reported to the Receiver of Wreck within 28 days.

Picking and lifting

ALDFG that can be picked up by hand should be placed in a small bag or container and carried to the surface.

Care should be taken to ensure that any hooks or sharp edges do not injure the divers. Sturdy gloves are recommended for this type of work. It is recommended that an up to date first aid kit is stored on the support vessel.

For hand-picking, it is recommended that the total weight of the bag containing recovered items should not exceed 5kg when full. Additional weight can affect buoyancy and cause a hazard to the diver. The bag should never be attached to the diver by any clips or lanyards. This technique is typically restricted to small objects, monofilament lines and hooks and similar objects.

Suitable containers may be carried by the diver, where they do not pose entanglement hazards and will only contain lightweight litter and ALDFG.

Collections of smaller amounts of ALDFG that in total weigh in excess of 5kg should be placed in larger bags or containers and removed with the assistance of a lifting bag.

Objects can be cut into pieces for easier handling.

This technique is well suited to ropes and larger pieces of netting. The container or bag keeps the objects constrained into a smaller volume, reducing the risk of entanglement with divers when the gear is lifted to the surface.

Larger items

Large objects that cannot be moved into bags or containers should be removed directly using lifting bags.

The process of removing the ALDFG should follow the following sequence:

1. Cut obvious elements of ALDFG that are attached to seabed features.
2. Attach lifting bag(s) to appropriate points on the ALDFG using karabiners, slings or ropes.
3. Gently inflate the lifting bag to tension the lifting points.
4. Review the entanglement status of the object, and cut any more attachments.
5. Repeat steps 3 and 4 until the object is free of the seabed.
6. Clear the dive team from the immediate area.

7. Add gas incrementally to the lifting bag(s) until the object becomes just positively buoyant
8. Observe the object rising to the surface for as long as the visibility allows.

Disposal of Waste

Any ALDFG removed from the sea and recovered to land should be disposed of in a responsible manner. Planning for this phase of the work should be completed before any removal occurs.

Recycling of ALDFG is the preferred disposal route, but this is not always possible or practical. It should however be investigated for all projects. The project manager should consult with the relevant authorities regarding disposal.

[Guidance: Marine licensing guidance for recreational divers](#)

Updated: HTML guide added

Legislative and policy

The Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 changed how certain activities that occur in tidal rivers, on the coast and out at sea are consented to protect the marine environment and all that it contains. Activities sometimes carried out by divers including deposit, removal and dredge activities became marine licensable activities in certain circumstances.

The MMO is responsible for marine licensing in English Inshore and offshore areas and Northern Ireland offshore areas and in some instances for activities undertaken outside of this area in other parts of the world. The MMO are also responsible for the management of non-licensable activities that occur within marine protected areas.

Details of the [MMO's jurisdiction](#).

Divers can check the MMO's [geographical information system](#) if they are unsure if the location of their dive falls within the part of the UK marine area managed by the MMO.

When do I need a marine licence for recreation

diving?

In most cases the activities undertaken in the course of a recreational dive will be limited to deposit and removal activities.

The circumstances in which the deposit or removal activity is carried out is key to understanding whether the activity proposed may be one that needs a licence.

Deposit – If a deposit in the sea, or on or under the seabed, is made from a vehicle, vessel, aircraft, marine structure or floating container it is likely require a licence.

A deposit in the sea, or on or under the seabed, carried out by hand alone (where the object is not taken from a vessel into the sea as part of the process) does NOT require a marine licence.

Example 1

A diver intends to dive at a location close to the shore. The diver wishes to place an object on the seabed at the location. The diver accesses the sea from the shore and swims to the location carrying the object and deposits the item. As the object to be deposited has not been taken from a vessel in the course of the activity the deposit is made 'by hand' and no licence is required.

Example 2

A diver intends to dive at a location away from the shore which requires the use of a vessel to transport both the diver and equipment. The diver wishes to place an object on the seabed at the location. The diver accesses the sea from the vessel taking with them an object which is subsequently left in the sea or on or under the sea bed. The object placed in the sea is an object deposited from a vessel and as such is likely to require a marine licence (see [recreational dive activity table](#)). The use of the vessel in the process is key.

Removal – If a removal from the seabed is made using a vehicle, vessel, aircraft, marine structure or floating container (Lifting bag) it is likely to require a marine licence.

A removal from the seabed carried out by hand alone (where a vessel or lifting bag is not used to make the removal does NOT require a marine licence.

'Seabed' means the ground under the sea (the seafloor) and includes anything resting on it such as a wreck.

Example 1

In the course of a dive a diver discovers some abandoned, lost, discarded fishing gear (ALDFG). As there is only a small amount of ALDFG gear the diver

is able to pick it up and carry it back to the surface where it is transferred to a vessel. The diver repeats this process several times until all the ALDFG is recovered. The removal of the objects from the seabed takes place by hand and does NOT require a marine licence.

Example 2

In the course of a dive a diver discovers some ALDFG. The nature of ALDFG in question is of a size and quantity that requires the diver to use a lifting bag to raise it to the surface where it is winched onto the vessel. The removal of the item from the seabed takes place using a lifting bag (floating container) and as such a marine licence is likely to be required (see [recreational dive activity table](#)). While a winch on the vessel is also used in this scenario it is not relevant as the ALDFG was no longer on the seabed when it was engaged.

Example 3

In the course of a dive a diver discovers a large heavy object and wishes to recover it. The size and weight of the item means that it is necessary to winch it directly from the seabed. The removal of the item from the seabed takes place using a winch on a vessel and as such a marine licence is required (see [recreational dive activity table](#)).

If your proposed activity is one that will involve 'deposit from' or 'removal using' one of those means set out, there are some further considerations which ultimately determine whether or not a licence will be required.

Requirements under other legislation

The need for a marine licence as set out in this document does not absolve divers from requirements under other legislation. Divers should familiarise themselves with those requirements to ensure compliance. Requirements likely to be relevant to divers include, but are not limited to, those set out:

Health and Safety

- The Diving at Work regulations 1997, including the HSE ACOPS

The approved code of practice and associated guidance is available [here](#)

Historic environment

- the Protection of Wrecks Act 1973
- the Merchant Shipping Act 1995
- the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979
- the Protection of Military Remains Act 1986

Details of the law and responsibilities of divers under relevant legislation including details of the process for reporting wreck can be found [here](#).

Other environmental

- the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981
- the Conservation of Seals Act 1970
- conservation of Offshore Marine Habitats and Species Regulations 2017
- conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017
- marine and Coastal Access Act 2009

You must have a marine wildlife licence if you want to carry out an activity in the marine area that would otherwise be an offence under UK and EU legislation (disturb, take or kill protected species).

MMO licence activities in English waters below low water mark (high water mark for seals).

As the issue of a wildlife licence permits an offence to be committed, such as disturbance or taking of a species, a licence is issued as a last resort.

Full details about marine wildlife licence requirements can be found [here](#).

Details of the law and responsibilities of divers under other relevant legislation can be found [here](#).

Notice: PR4 3PJ, Cuadrilla Bowland Limited (EPR/KP3731JR/A001): environmental permit application advertisement

The Environment Agency consults the public on certain applications for waste operations, mining waste operations, installations, water discharge and groundwater activities. The arrangements are explained in its [Public Participation Statement](#)

These notices explain:

- what the application is about
- where you can visit to see the application documents
- when you need to comment by

The Environment Agency will decide:

- whether to grant or refuse the application
- what conditions to include in the permit (if granted)

[News story: Blue Belt publication for schools launched](#)

A [new Government publication](#) has been created to introduce the work of the Blue Belt Programme to secondary school children.

The publication was launched at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in April 2018, on board the Cefas Endeavour vessel, with the help of local school children from South London.

The [Blue Belt programme](#) supports delivery of the UK government's commitment to provide long term protection of over four million square kilometres of marine environment across the UK Overseas Territories.

[Consultation outcome: Enrolment of SMETS1 meter cohorts with the Data Communications Company](#)

Updated: Government response published.

A number of energy suppliers are installing first generation (SMETS1) smart meters, using their own data and communications systems to provide smart services. While SMETS1 meters support accurate bills and near real-time energy consumption which enable consumers to realise the benefit of smart metering, consumers may lose smart services on switching to another energy supplier.

The government's long-standing policy for resolving this issue is for all significant populations of SMETS1 meters to eventually be operated via the national data and communications provider, the Data Communications Company (DCC).

This consultation considers the business case for certain cohorts of SMETS1 meters – consisting of Aclara, Honeywell Elster, Itron and Landis+Gyr meters – to be enrolled in the DCC. This is based on a cost-benefit analysis and consideration of security and the technical feasibility of enrolment.

A subsequent consultation will consider the remaining SMETS1 meter cohorts (Secure Meters and EDM1 meters) once there is sufficiently mature information

from existing and prospective service providers and the DCC.