

AQUACULTURE MODELLING SCREENING & RISK IDENTIFICATION REPORT: North Shore East (Erisort 4)

June 2023

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Scope of report

As part of the SEPA Aquaculture Regulatory Framework it is recommended that a proposed application for a marine fin fish aquaculture site should undergo a Screening Modelling and Risk Identification process. SEPA carries out this work and this is described on the SEPA aquaculture website Pre-application section:

(<https://www.sepa.org.uk/regulations/water/aquaculture/pre-application/>)

This report presents information arising from that process. Screening modelling methods are outlined and maps and tables describing the modelled impacts are shown. Risks arising from consideration of the model output are listed. Conclusions and recommendations are made regarding the proposed site.

Executive summary

SEPA has received a proposal to vary an existing marine fin fish aquaculture site called North Shore East (ERI4). The site is located in Loch Erisort, at location: 139438 922957.6 (Easting, Northing). The proposal is to increase the 24hr Azamethiphos limit from 229.2g to 412.6g using marine modelling rather than conservative BathAuto, and to vary the cage layout. No change is proposed to the existing maximum biomass of 2400t at this location.

Following screening modelling and risk identification we have concluded the following:

- It is possible that discharges from North Shore East (ERI4) will be able to comply with the relevant aspects of the SEPA Aquaculture Regulatory Framework.
- Features at risk, identified at this stage, do not appear to influence the feasibility of the proposed site with respect to the regulatory framework. These risks should be examined using a detailed marine model.
- North Shore East (ERI4) is suitable to progress to the next stage of the pre-application process outlined on the SEPA website.
- NewDepomod modelling should be undertaken for the proposed site, if the proposed pen layout changes does not meet the admin checklist. If required, it is strongly recommended that default NewDepomod modelling is undertaken prior to any marine modelling, to ensure the proposed biomass can be supported.
(However, as the cage layout change will be insignificant in terms of wider impacts and cumulative risks that would be assessed using marine modelling, marine modelling of solids will not be required.)

List of abbreviations

SEPA Scottish Environment Protection Agency

List of chemical abbreviations

AZA Azamethiphos

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1 Introduction

Screening Modelling and Risk Identification are important steps in the SEPA regulatory framework for marine pen fish farms. They are carried out by SEPA at the pre-application stage, which is described in detail at:

<https://www.sepa.org.uk/regulations/water/aquaculture/pre-application/>.

This document briefly describes the objectives of screening and risk identification and summarises the methods used. Screening output for the proposed site is then presented with comments. Risks identified from the screening output are detailed. Conclusions and recommendations about the suitability of the proposed site are then made.

1.1 The objectives of screening modelling and risk identification

A summary of the modelling methods employed during screening modelling is outlined in section 1.2. The objectives of screening modelling and risk identification are outlined below.

1.1.1 Screening modelling

Marine Modelling technology can be used to simulate and predict the potential influence of discharges on the marine environment. SEPA will require the majority of proposed farms to conduct detailed marine modelling, as outlined in our Aquaculture Modelling guidance [1] and on the SEPA Website.

Marine modelling can also be used at an earlier stage to provide an initial estimate of the influence of material discharged from a proposed site.

SEPA will carry out marine modelling at the screening and risk identification stage. This is a simplified version of the detailed modelling required of the applicant. However, it will be sufficient to perform an initial risk assessment of a proposal. Screening marine modelling will also include discharges from other relevant aquaculture sites and major sources.

The objectives of the simplified screening modelling are to:

- Produce maps of the predicted dispersive and erosive capacity of the sea areas in the vicinity of aquaculture sites
- Produce maps of the predicted spread of sediment discharged from aquaculture sites
- Produce maps of the predicted spread of bath treatment medicines from aquaculture sites
- Present an analysis of the potential influence of sediment and bath treatment discharges from the proposed site alongside existing sites within the surrounding sea area

- Present information on the sensitive features and sites of interest within the surrounding sea area, which must be addressed during pre-application work
- Present a summary of the suitability of the proposal with respect to the dispersal of waste and how this may be modelled.

1.1.2 Risk identification

Maps and analysis of screening output will be compared to information relating to sensitive features and relevant areas of interest. These may include:

- Marine Protected Area (MPA)
- Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- Priority Marine Feature (PMF)
- Any site identified via consideration of other permitted or regulatory activities.

SEPA Staff will meet to discuss screening model output and the relevant sensitive features information. Following this meeting, a list of identified risks will be added to this report.

1.1.3 Conclusion of screening modelling and risk identification

Following the identification of risks, SEPA will present a summary of the suitability of the proposal with respect to the:

- Dispersal of waste from the proposed site and other sources
- Risks posed to sensitive features
- Likely level of modelling that will be required to address the risks identified.

1.2 Screening modelling methods

Marine models divide the sea up into a “grid” of boxes or triangles (often called cells). Each of these is given a water depth. For the screening modelling presented in this report the Marine Scotland “East Coast, Lewis and Harris” (ECLH) has been used. An image of the ECLH model grid is shown in Figure 1. This grid has been set up within a marine modelling software package called MIKE 21 which is manufactured by the company DHI A/S (<https://www.dhigroup.com/>).

Marine models carry out calculations across a grid to work out how seawater moves and mixes in response to tidal and weather forces. Marine models can also be used to simulate how seawater moves and mixes due to salinity and temperature differences across an area, particularly in response to inputs of freshwater from rivers. For pollutant influence assessments the mixing (dispersion) of dissolved (bath medicine) and particulate (sediment) pollutants can also be estimated. Calculations within a marine model can be performed in three dimensions (3D), where the grid is split into layers to better represent how properties of the sea change with depth. Two dimensional (2D) models can also be created where

processes over the water depth are simplified. The amount of mixing in a marine model can be varied using settings in the software.

Screening modelling is currently carried out with 2D models using average mixing settings in the model software. In many areas, this approach will be sufficient to make an initial estimate of the influence of a proposed site. Our screening assessment will take into account factors which may limit a 2D approach. We will also consider whether a particular location is adequately represented by the available models.

1.2.1 Water movement and mixing modelling

Water movement and mixing modelling (hydrodynamics) has been carried out to generate one month of results. The boundaries (edge(s) of) the model have been driven using the “wider domain” Scottish Shelf Model [2]. Wind forces and freshwater inputs have been applied to the model from the same source. The results generated are an estimate of the average water movement and mixing conditions within the model area.

1.2.2 Sediment waste modelling

Screening modelling provides a precautionary and **indicative** estimate of the size, location and intensity of waste organic material released from aquaculture sites.

The release of sediment from sources within the model area is simulated using one month of hydrodynamic results along with particle tracking modelling technology. Virtual particles are continually introduced to the model grid to represent the potential dispersion of sediment from the sources. Particles in the model are moved and mixed by the hydrodynamics. Additionally, particles are assigned simplified properties, which allow them to settle through the water and be re-suspended (eroded and lifted) from the sea bed.

1.2.3 Bath medicine modelling

Screening modelling provides a precautionary and **indicative** estimate of the size, location and concentration of bath medicine releases.

The release of bath treatment medicine from sources within the model area is simulated using hydrodynamic results along with particle tracking modelling technology. Virtual particles are introduced to the model grid to represent the potential dispersion of bath medicines from the sources. Particles in the model are moved and mixed by the hydrodynamics. Releases of bath medicines are simulated under worst case mixing (dispersion) conditions, which occur under neap tides. The maximum treatment amount likely to be used at each site is released into the model at the same time and plumes are tracked over the following 96 hours (4 days). Treatment amounts used at screening have been derived from an analysis of historical data. Additionally, all bath medicine particles are concentrated within the top 5 m of the sea area. As all bath medicines are likely to disperse in a similar way, only Azamethiphos (AZA) has been modelled at the screening stage.

1.2.4 Nutrient assessment

Whilst nutrients are not directly modelled during screening, the dispersion of bath medicine releases will give an indication of the likely level of nutrient dispersion. This will be considered alongside any pre-existing nutrient assessment information that may be available.

1.2.5 Analysis of modelling output

SEPA processes the screening modelling output and places it into a standard analysis application built in TIBCO Spotfire. The application allows for the production of standard maps and tables, which are presented below.

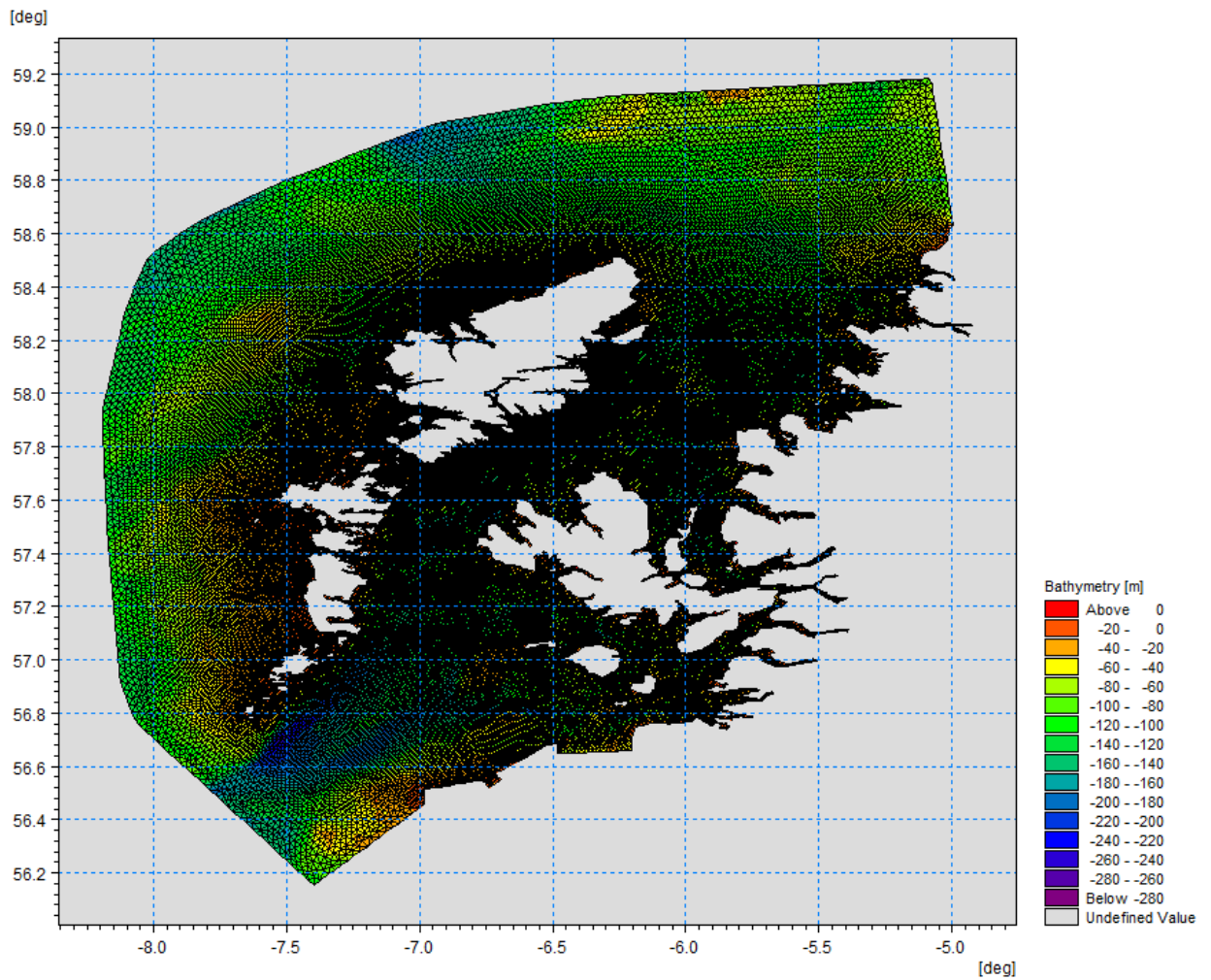


Figure 1: East Coast, Lewis and Harris model grid

2 Screening modelling

2.1 Site proposal

SEPA has received a proposal to vary an existing marine fin fish aquaculture site called North Shore East (ERI4). The site is located in Loch Erisort, at location: 139438 922957.6 (Easting, Northing). The proposal is to increase the 24hr Azamethiphos limit from 229.2g to 412.6g using marine modelling rather than conservative BathAuto, and to vary the cage layout. No change is proposed to the existing maximum biomass of 2400t at this location.

For the screening modelling presented here all relevant licenced sites and current applications have been modelled in conjunction with the proposed site. However, as the cage layout change will be insignificant in terms of wider impacts and cumulative risks that would be assessed using marine modelling of solids, this will not be required, and solids screening has not been undertaken.

2.1.1 Accuracy of model in the area surrounding the proposal

The East Coast, Lewis and Harris model used for screening modelling has a relatively low resolution in this area. Comparison against various sources of observed current meter data indicates that the model provides a good description of the physical processes in the vicinity of the proposed site.

2.2 Dispersion and erosion capacity maps

Modelled water movement in a sea area can be analysed and presented to show the capacity of the water to move and disperse discharged substances. It is also possible to show the capacity available to erode substances from the seabed. This information is a useful guide to the potential size of a marine fin fish aquaculture farm at a particular location.

Marine fin fish aquaculture farms using open-net pens will benefit from operating in locations where there are strong, repeating, water currents to erode and disperse waste.

For the purposes of screening we consider locations which meet the following water flow criteria to be generally suitable for larger farms:

Locations with average water flow speeds of greater than, or equal to, 0.12 metres per second (0.23 knots)

Locations where water flow speeds are often above the threshold of 0.095 meters per second (0.18 knots).

Locations with these properties are likely to disperse discharged material rapidly, and regularly erode sediment discharged to the seabed. In general, we would look for these properties to be maintained over a large area around a proposed site.

The thresholds stated above are indicative.

A map of modelled average water flow speed for the area surrounding the proposed site is shown in Figure 2. The average water flow speed in each cell of the model grid (see section 1.2) has been assigned a shade. The key for the shading is shown in the top left of the figure. Grid cells that have average speeds less than 0.12 m/s (metres per second) are marked on the figure. The greater the shading, the slower the average current speed and the lower the capacity for dispersion.

Figure 3 is a map of the percentage of time the modelled water flow speed in a grid cell is above 0.095 m/s (metres per second). The greater the shading, the lower the capacity for material to be eroded from the seabed.

Licensed aquaculture farms in the vicinity of the proposed site are also marked on Figure 2 and Figure 3. Discharges of material from these sites have been included in the screening modelling.

Based on the maps of the modelled water flow properties we can make the following observations about the proposed site location:

- It lies in a moderate dispersion area.

2.3 Bath medicine influence maps and analysis

Modelled particles in a sea area can be analysed for each modelled grid cell and presented to show the potential influence of discharged bath medicine on the surrounding sea area. Results presented are for the AZA medicine (see section 1.2.3).

2.3.1

Figure 6 shows a map of the modelled average AZA concentration over four days for the proposed site only. Grid cells within the model which experience an AZA influence are shaded according to the concentration of AZA in nanograms per litre (ng/l).

Values less than 10 ng/l have been excluded from the map and subsequent calculations. These low concentration cells are produced by the particle tracking approach but they are not considered to be representative of the main influence of a discharge.

Please note that the Environmental Standard for Azamethiphos with the lowest concentration is 40 ng/l. This must be met 72 hours after the material has been discharged. The estimate of influence detailed here is precautionary. In the information presented below areas of influence above 40 ng/l have been quoted. However the average and median concentrations are quoted for the entire area of influence above 10 ng/l.

The shading key is shown in the top left of the figure. Cells which are shaded black are similar to the average concentration in the total area of influence shown in the map. Cells shaded pink are similar to the median (middle value in the range) concentration shown on the map. White shaded cells are similar to the minimum concentration value shown on the map.

- The average and median concentration over the total area of influence is 17.36ng/l and 14.61 ng/l respectively.
Cells influenced by the proposed site appear to lie close to other modelled farm sites.

Figure 7 shows a map of the modelled average AZA influence over four days for the proposed site and other relevant sites. The average AZA influence, after including all relevant sites, is increased.

- The average and median AZA concentration over the total area of influence is 25.81 ng/l and 17.67 ng/l respectively.
- Cells influenced by other modelled sites appear to lie close to the proposed site.

2.3.2 Bath medicine influence analysis

Model grid cells can be analysed to estimate the size and concentration of the potential AZA influence from the modelled sites.

- The area of AZA influenced above 40 ng/l from all sites modelled is estimated to be 1.04 square kilometres (km²).
- As shown in Figure 7, the average and median concentration over the total area of influence is 25.81 and 17.67 ng/l respectively.
- The total weight of fish that generates this modelled influence is 9399 tonnes.

Table 1 shows the information for each individual site modelled. It is important to note that the total area of influence above 40ng/l for all sites quoted above is not the sum of the numbers in Table 1. The total area of influence worked out above takes into account that the individual areas of influence above 40 ng/l from different sites will overlap.

Table 1: Azamethiphos influence information for each site.

Site Name	Average Conc. (ng/l)	Area of Influence Above 40 ng/l (km²)	Median Conc. (ng/l)	Weight Of Fish (tonnes)
ERI4	17.36	0.05	14.61	2400
ERI3	19.25	0.14	14.63	1650
GRI1	37.55	0.18	29.92	622
LEU1	28.66	0.43	21.30	625
PEC1	0	0	0	2
PEC3	15.22	0	14.83	1600
TAB1	15.90	0	16.43	2500

Please note that the Environmental Standard for Azamethiphos with the lowest concentration is 40 ng/l. This must be met 72 hours after the material has been discharged. The estimate of influence detailed above is precautionary. The values presented are close to the 40 ng/l standard. Detailed modelling will be required to demonstrate compliance with all Environmental Standards.

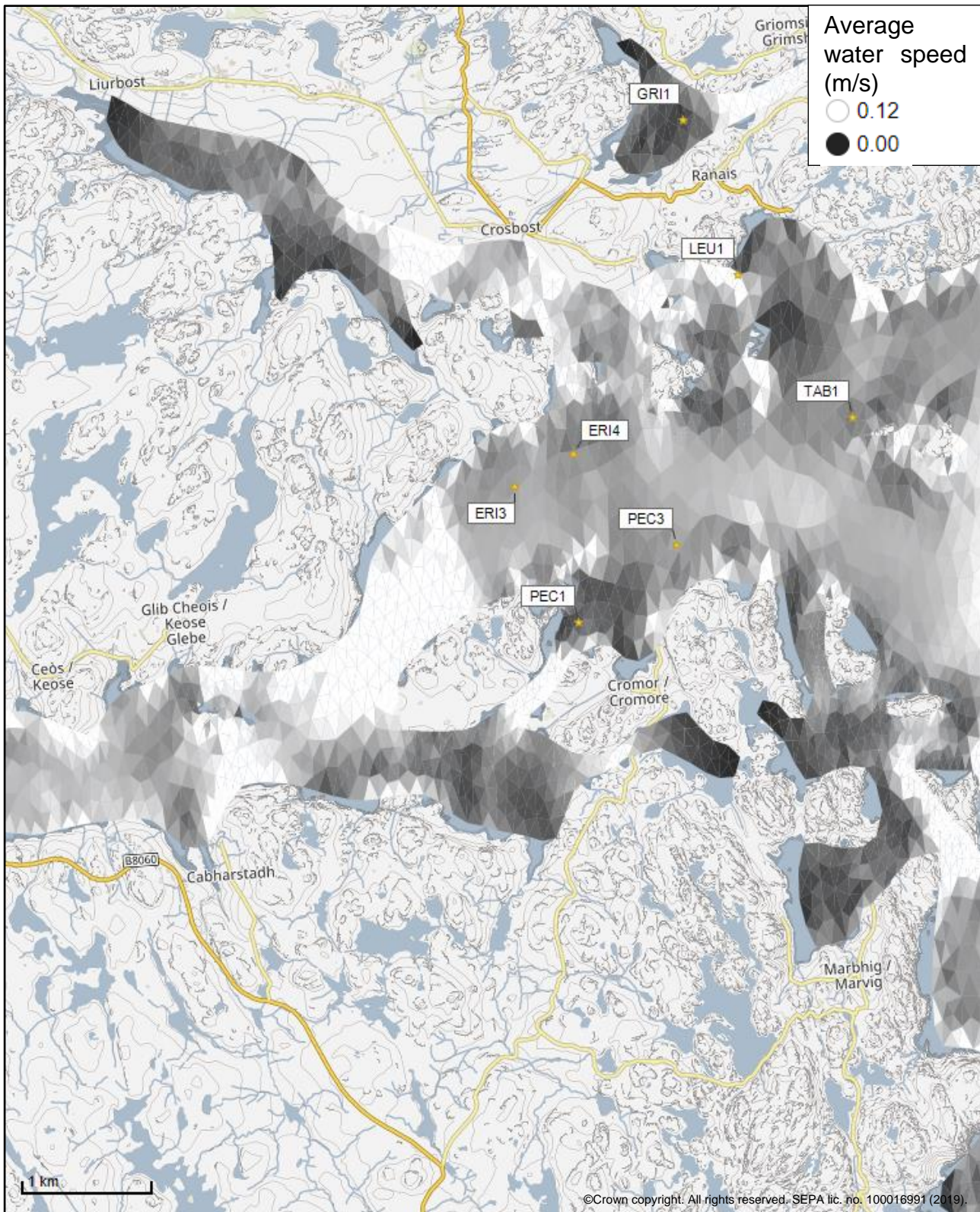


Figure 2: Modelled average water speed (metres per second – m/s) in the sea area surrounding the proposed site (North Shore East (ERI4)).

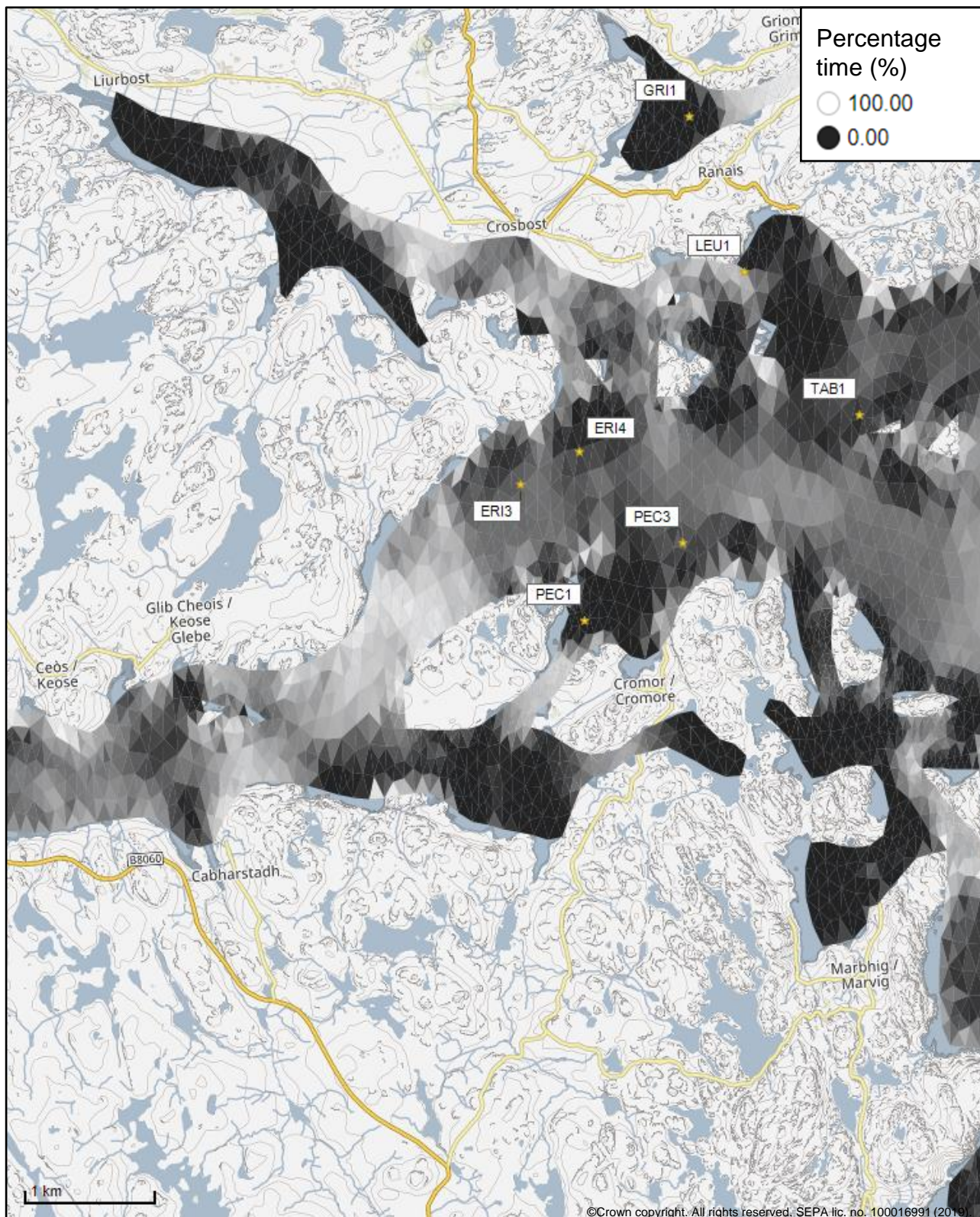


Figure 3: Modelled percentage of time the water flow speed is above 0.095 m/s in the sea area surrounding the proposed site (North Shore East (ERI4)).

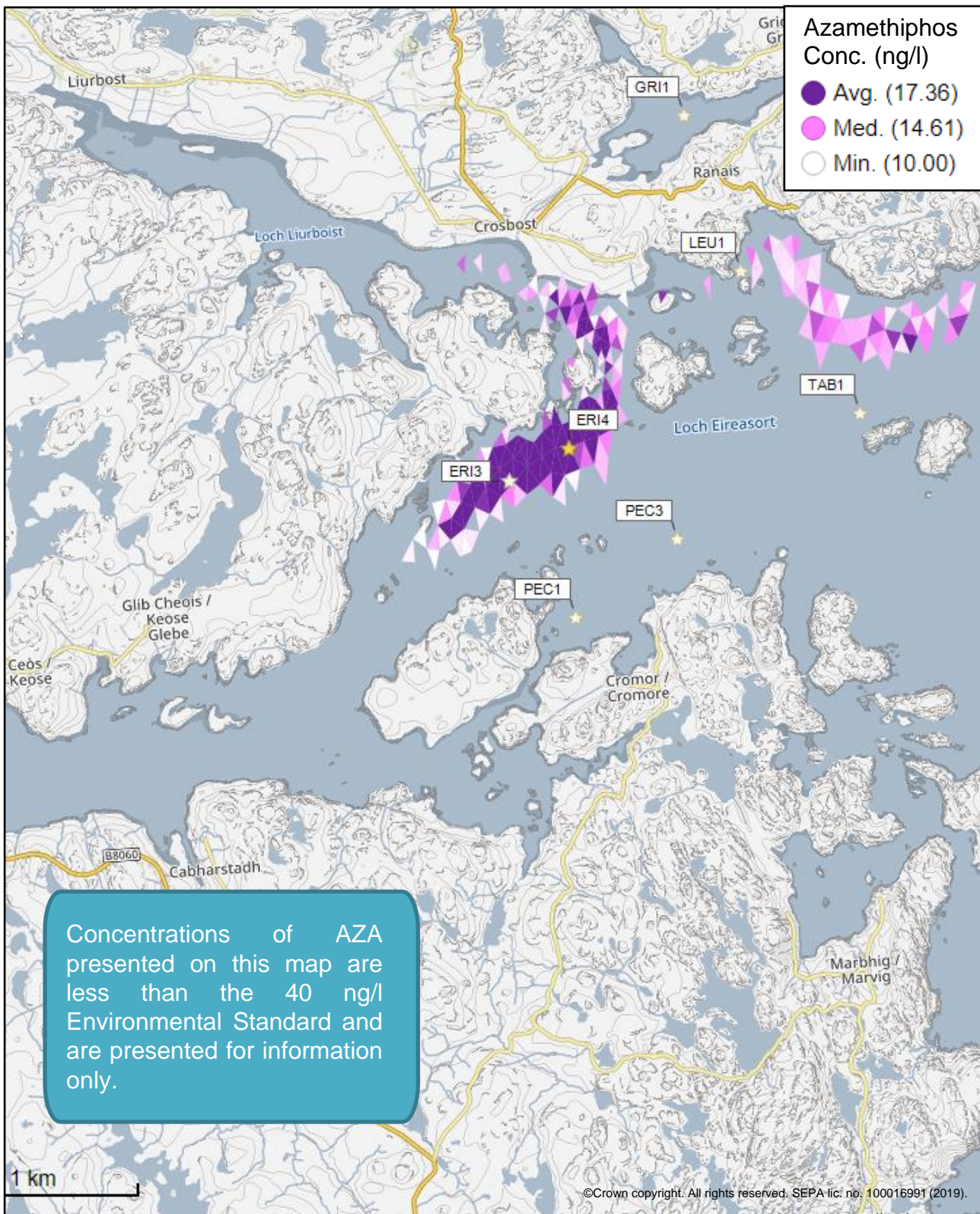


Figure 4: Modelled average Azamethiphos concentration over four days from neap tide release for the proposed site only (North Shore East (ERI4)).

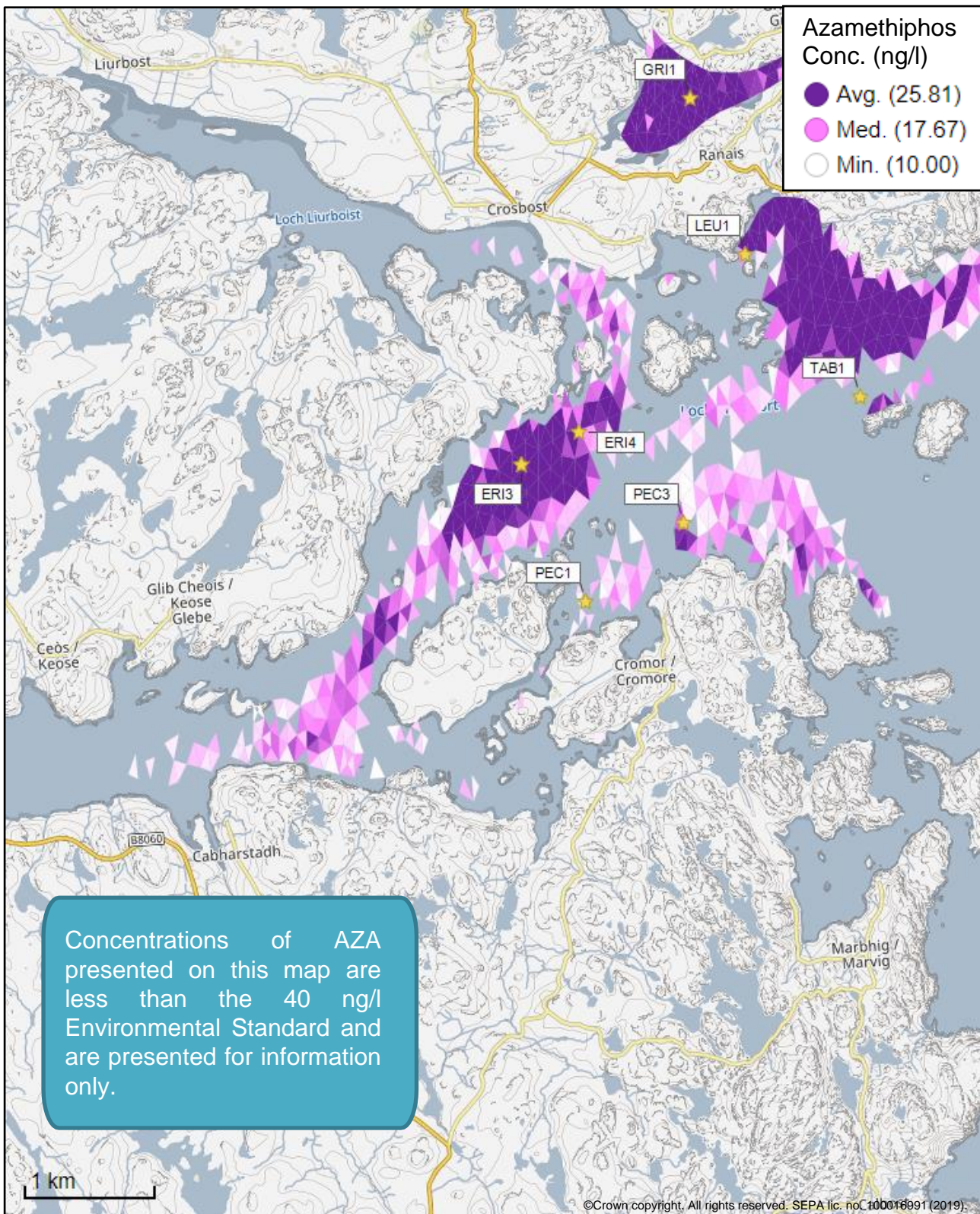


Figure 5: Modelled average Azamethiphos concentration over four days from neap tide release for the proposed site (North Shore East (ERI4)) and other relevant sites.

3 Risk Identification

The screening modelling output summarised in section 2 is compared against available information on features of interest (see section 1.1.2). Features which require attention are presented with any additional comments. Identified features will need to be considered during the pre-application phase.

These should be addressed in the applicant "Method Statement". Please refer to the Modelling Method Statement section on the SEPA Website.

(<https://www.sepa.org.uk/regulations/water/aquaculture/pre-application/>)

3.1 Identified features which require attention

3.1.1 Table of identified features

Based on screening output the following features of interest have been identified.

Table 2: Table of identified features

No.	Feature Name	Feature Type	Location (Easting, Northing)	Brief Reason For Identification
1	Shellfish Growing/Protected Areas	Shellfish Site	Shapefiles 1 & 2 (Figure 6)	At risk from bath influence

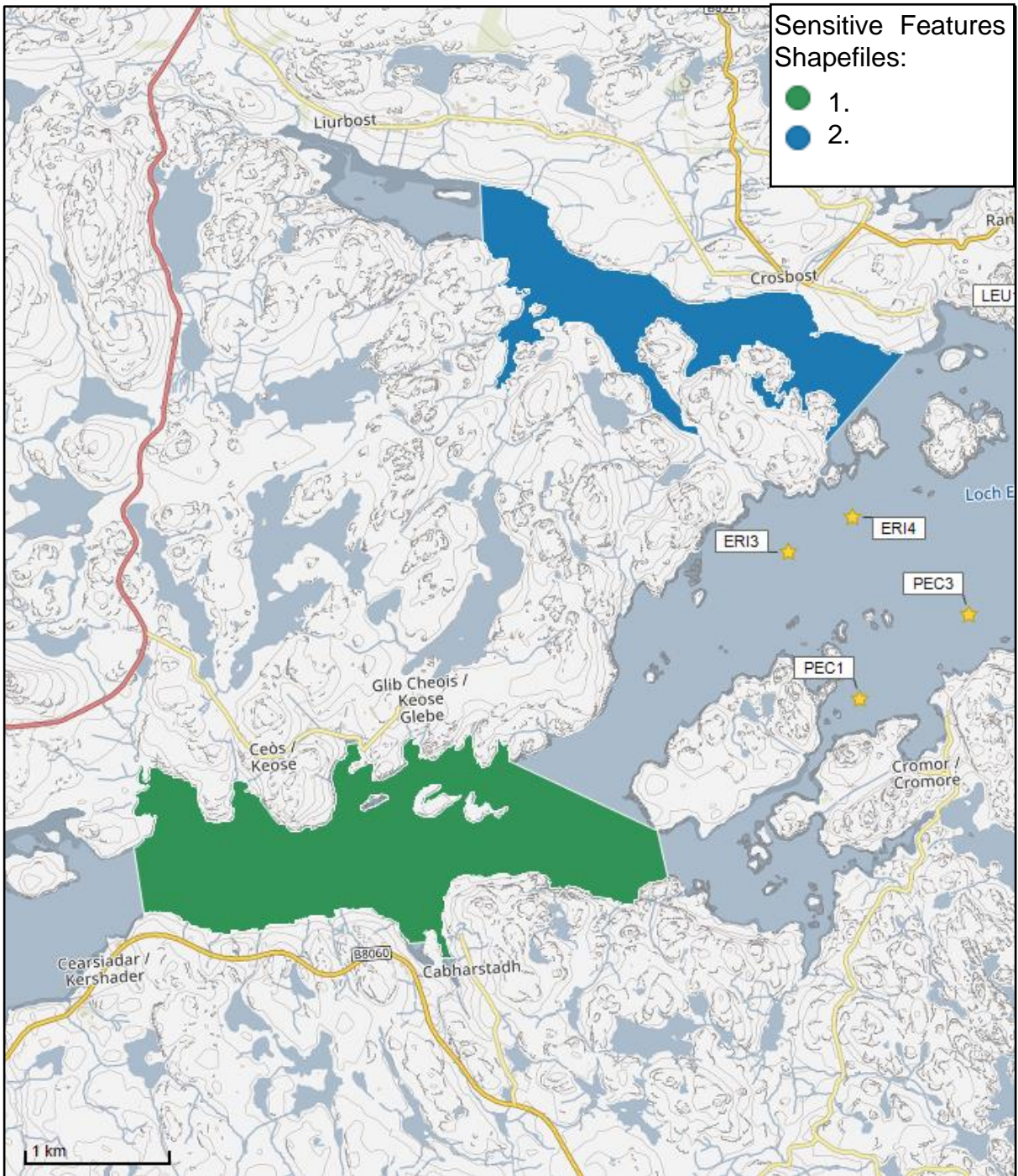


Figure 6. Shapefiles of identified features around the proposed site (North Shore East (ERI4)).

3.2 Additional comments on identified features

Whilst screening modelling does not predict any significant bath influence from North Shore East (ERI4), this site is near to Shellfish Growing and Protected Areas. This means higher resolution marine modelling of baths will be required. Particular focus should be on the identified features. Cumulative modelling of baths is however not required.

3.3 Risks identified from contextual site data

Should this application proceed, the total licenced biomass in this area would be 9399t.

Table 3: Table of licenced biomass from farms identified as likely to add to cumulative risks. (This is provided for illustrative purposes only in this instance, as cumulative modelling of baths is not required at this time.)

Site Name	Location (Easting, Northing)	Biomass (tonnes)	Last Production Cycle
ERI4	139438, 922957.6	2400	Fish last on site Mar 22
ERI3	138976.2, 922744.3	1650	Fish last on site Sept 21
GRI1	140457, 925378	622	Fish last on site Jun 05
LEU1	140800, 924200	625	Fish last on site Dec 12
PEC1	139400, 921700	2	Fish last on site Aug 06
PEC3	140200, 922230	1600	Fish last on site Jun 14
TAB1	141621, 923083	2500	Currently Stocked (Since Sep 22)

4 Conclusions of screening modelling and risk identification

Following screening modelling and risk identification we make a number of conclusions and recommendations.

4.1 Conclusions

4.1.1 Screening Modelling

- According to screening modelling, the proposed site (North Shore East (ERI4)) is in an area of moderate dispersion and has a moderate capacity for erosion of material on the sea bed.
- From bath treatment modelling:
 - It is likely that discharges of bath medicines from North Shore East (ERI4) will be dispersed to moderate levels over a moderate area.
 - North Shore East (ERI4) is likely to result in a small increase in the total influence of all sites modelled. This is likely to interact at low levels with areas of influence generated by existing sites.

4.1.2 Risk identification

Although the modelled influence from North Shore East (ERI4) appears to be low, several features of interest have been identified, which require further attention during pre-application work. These are outlined in section 3. Further detailed modelling will need to demonstrate that the influence on these features is low. (*Cumulative modelling of baths will not be required*).

4.2 Recommendations

4.2.1 Site suitability

Consideration of screening modelling and risk identification suggests that it is possible that discharges from the proposed site will be able to comply with the relevant aspects of the SEPA Aquaculture Regulatory Framework. This must be demonstrated with a detailed marine model.

It is also possible that the site will be able to comply with our mixing zone regulatory framework. This will need to be demonstrated using the NewDepomod model should the proposed cage layout change does not meet the admin checklist.

Features at risk, identified at this stage, do not appear to influence the feasibility of the proposed site, with respect to the regulatory framework. These risks should be examined using a detailed marine model.

Following the engagement meeting(s), this report will be revised and this should allow to the applicant to submit a method statement which address the issues raised in this document.

4.2.2 Further modelling

- Due to the identified risks, 2D marine modelling should be carried out.
- The size of the marine model should include discharges from all sites identified in this report. Cumulative modelling including these identified sites will not be required for baths.
- The resolution of the marine model should be relatively fine around the proposed site and identified features at risk.
- Calibration with dye/drogue will also be required. (Given the proximity to the protected shellfish areas, we would recommend the use of drogues to help calibrate advection patterns).
- Due to the proposed cage layout change, the admin checklist should be completed to determine whether NewDepomod modelling is required for the proposed site. It is strongly recommended that default NewDepomod modelling is undertaken prior to any marine modelling, to ensure the local impacts of the proposed biomass are acceptable.

(However, as the cage layout change will be insignificant in terms of wider impacts and cumulative risks that would be assessed using marine modelling, marine modelling of solids will not be required.)

5 References

- [1] *Regulatory Modelling Guidance For The Aquaculture Sector. Published on SEPA website.*
- [2] <http://marine.gov.scot/information/wider-domain-scottish-shelf-model>.