Surveying seed mussel beds in Ireland

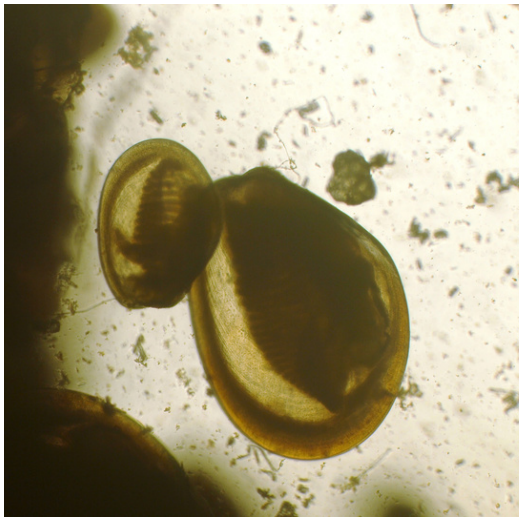
The Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM) *M.V.T Burke II* is primarily used to monitor and survey mussel bed stocks along the east coast from Carnsore Point, Co Wexford to Carlingford, Co Louth and also in Dingle Bay.

These surveys form an integral part of the management of the seed mussel fishery, providing invaluable data to help drive growth of this important sector and minimising the environmental impact and carbon footprint of the sector.

A side scan sonar is used to generate an acoustic image of the seabed allowing BIM technical officers to know whether seed mussel is present or not.

A side scan sonar

The Irish mussel industry was valued at €18 million to the Irish economy in 2021. More than 17,000 tonnes of mussels were produced in Ireland last year. Bottom grown mussels made up 5,800 tonnes of that total. The sector has been recognised by the global eco-label and certification programme, the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) since 2013.



Mussel larvae

Seed mussel on a crab

In 2021, BIM's inshore survey vessel, *M.V. T. Burke II*, surveyed for 46 days, covering over 4,500 hectares including Rosslare, around the Long Bank, the Blackwater Bank, the Rusk Channel, around Cahore Point and south of Wicklow Head.

Four seed mussel settlements were found between Wicklow Head and Rosslare, with a combined footprint of approximately 210 hectares.

Following the biomass survey methodology adopted in 2020, which provides more accurate data, it was estimated that at least 9,150 metric tonnes of seed mussel was available for transplanting by the bottom grown mussel industry.

BIM's survey vessel was also deployed during selective fishing gear trials in June 2021. Acoustic imagery of trawling gear was collected using the side-scan sonar, giving fishers real-time displays of the fishing gear on the seabed, allowing for on-site net settings correction.

Seed Mussel beds Location for East Wexford Coast from 1970 to 2021 - BIM