



Agenda Item No. B2

By: Assistant Chief Officer
To: Kent and Essex IFCA – 26 November 2021
Subject: **2021 Cockle Fishery Management**
Classification: Unrestricted

Summary:

This paper will provide Members with a summary of the cockle fishery management for 2021 for both the Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery Order (TECFO) 1994 and the Permitted Cockle Fishery (chart of fisheries attached).

Recommendations:

Members are asked to **NOTE** this report and provide **COMMENT**.

Background:

1. Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery Order

The cockle fishery within the area of the Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery Order opened between 20 June 2021 and 8 October 2021. The scheduling of trips over the course of the season has been maintained as per the schedule agreed at the May Authority meeting with a total TAC of 6160 tonnes

Date	Number of weeks	Number of landings per week
20 June – 16 July	4 weeks	2 landings per week
18 July – 10 September	9 weeks	3 landings per week
12 September – 8 October	4 weeks	2 landings per week

Catches of the maximum of 13.6 m³ were consistently made throughout the season with excellent catch rates and good yields from most areas with excellent yields being found in some areas. In general, weather conditions were good during the season. The total allowable catch (TAC) of 6160 tonnes was maintained for the season. All trips were undertaken by all vessels and landings of the maximum permitted quantity were made for all trips. As a result, the full 6160 tonnes was landed by the fleet.

1(a) Autumn Cockle Stock Surveys 2021

Cockle stock surveys were completed between 8 and 13 September 2021 for the main cockle harvesting areas within the TECFO on the Maplin.

Following three years of poor recruitment, in 2021 a good amount of spat has been located during the course of the survey. Whilst not as large as in 2016-2018, it is nonetheless a good average spatfall which should bring some stability to the stock over the coming year. However, much will depend upon the severity of the winter weather and how this young year class survives.

Numbers of adult cockle on the ground remain strong, however these individuals are coming to the end of their normal lifespan for the Thames Estuary and this is expected to have an impact on the fishery in 2022.

The following graphs show population numbers of adult cockles and spat for 2021 compared to earlier years.

Fig. 1: Adult cockle stock size in Spring and Autumn from 2004 to 2021

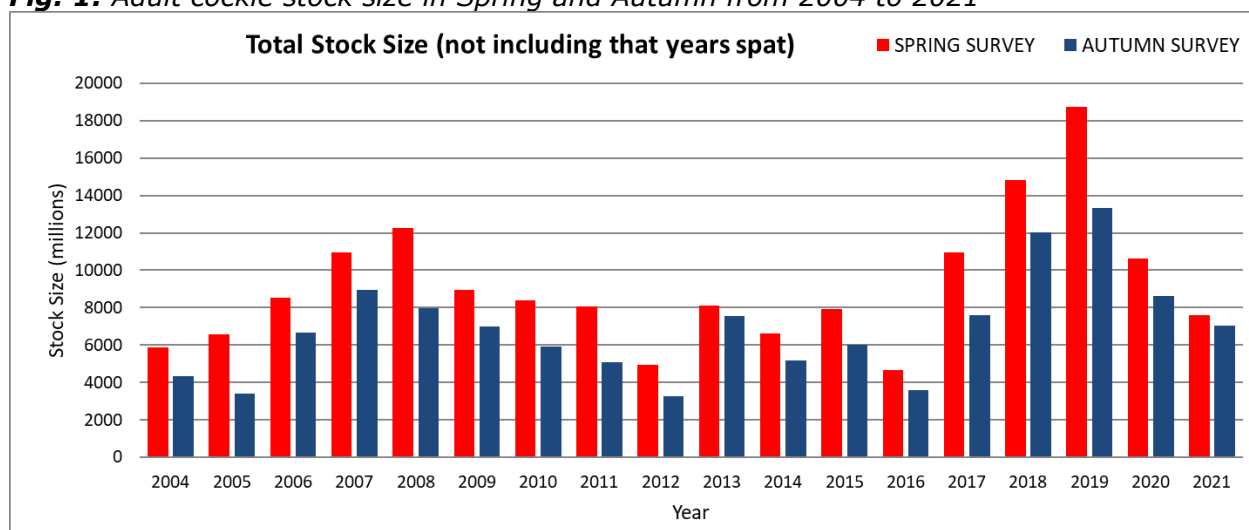
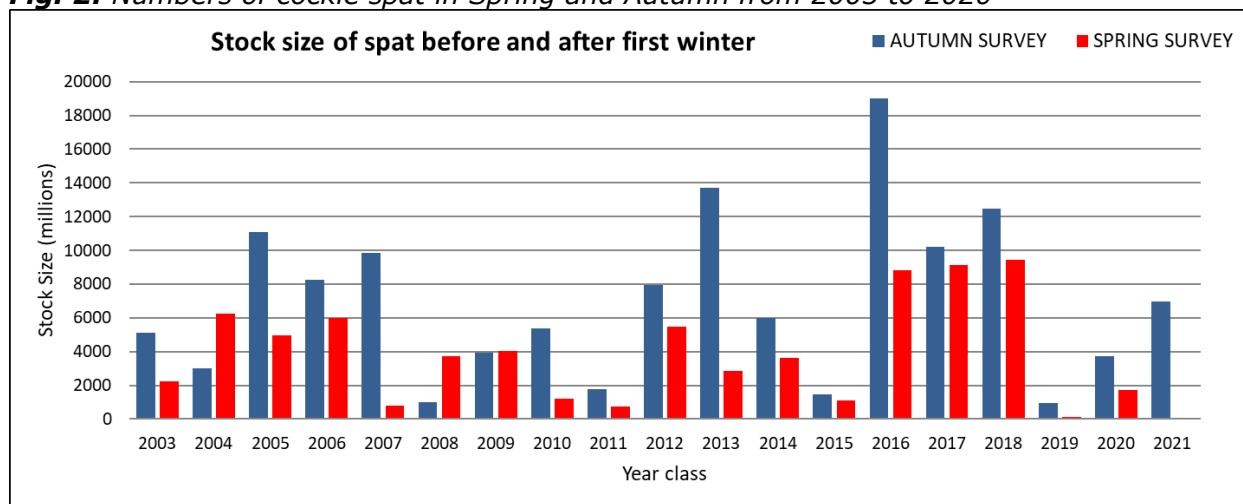


Fig. 2: Numbers of cockle spat in Spring and Autumn from 2003 to 2020



1 (b). Outlook for 2022 fishery and beyond

Outlook for the 2022 fishery is good but dependent upon how the relatively old adult cockles on the grounds hold up over the winter, yields could also be relatively low next year because of this. Adult stock numbers on the ground are good, and growth rates in 2021 appear to have recovered from those seen during the preceding two seasons which should help.

Winter survival rates will provide a better understanding of how the stock may perform in 2022. A harsh winter could reduce the stock considerably, whilst a mild winter may leave a larger stock into next season.

2. Permitted Cockle Fishery (outside of the TECFO 1994)

As discussed at the last Authority meeting, the outside cockle fishery will remain closed this year following insufficient stocks being detected during the surveys carried out in April. Following the completion of the spring 2022 surveys, a decision will be taken on the flexible permit fishery for next year.

Recommendations:
 Members are asked to **NOTE** this report and provide **COMMENT**.

