

From: Chief IFCO

To: Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority –  
27 March 2025

Subject: Future Manila clam trial proposal and consultation

Classification: **Unrestricted**

**Summary:**

Building on a successful 2024 clam trial, the Authority has agreed to run future fishery level trials to help develop a long-term sustainable clam fishery. The paper outlines a stakeholder consultation process to get feedback as to how the trial could be run and the potential application process for fishers who would like to take part. Results of the consultation will be summarised and discussed at the May Authority meeting.

**Recommendations:**

The Authority is asked to **DISCUSS** and **AGREE** to undertake a consultation on the future Manila clam trial.

The Authority is asked to **DISCUSS** and **AGREE** the consultation document (Appendix 1).

**Introduction**

The Manila clam (*Ruditapes philippinarum*) is a high-value seafood introduced to the UK as an aquaculture species in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Over the last few years Manila clams have become ever more abundant in the Thames and have the potential to become a viable future fishery. At the March 2024 KEIFCA meeting, the Authority agreed to run a trial to understand the impact and economic potential of different types of Manila clam harvesting gear and operations before any legislation is developed. The trial started on the 1 October 2024 and concluded on the 25 October 2024. A vast amount of data was collected, with officers conducting 28 boardings and 4 landings, measured 8 sets of fishing gear and processed 165 samples including over 18,500 clams. The results of the trial were discussed at the January Authority meeting and the

Authority agreed to a 2025 trial fishery focussing on fleet level impacts and understanding of the fishery.

### **Why do we need a fishery level trial?**

Building on the successful 2024 Manila clam trial, KEIFCA officers have worked closely with Natural England to build an evidence base to move from the trial phase into a commercial fishery.

Whilst the 2024 trial proved successful in understanding how different types of fishing gear worked, the next stages of the trial will help provide the evidence for the building blocks to create a sustainable future fishery working within an MPA. One of the key questions to understand is how the clam stocks will hold up to commercial levels of fishing both within a fisheries season and then the following season.

Working closely with willing and interested fishers will again be key to answering these questions and developing local knowledge to make a long-term sustainable fishery. In scoping out the detail officers have weighted up the both the evidential needs and the feedback from the 2024 trialists in outlining a 2-year trial. Running the trial over a longer period will help answer many of the key biological, fishing, economic and enforcement questions as well as provide an opportunity for the trialist to invest and commit to the trial with more confidence. As this is a step-by-step process it is hoped that sufficient data will have been gathered by the end of the trial to take the next step to creating a commercial fishery, however we will only know it this is the case once we have collected the data.

#### **Biological**

- Being able to reliably age the clams and so understand growth rates, size of maturity and age of maturity.
- The annual cycle of growth rates and maturity.
- Develop a reliable stock assessment process.
- Develop a better understanding of the distribution of clams and clam beds outside normal survey areas.

#### **Fishing**

- How will the clam stock react to different levels of fishing
- Can current Manila clam stocks sustain fishing over a 2-month fishing season.
- What will the Manila clam stocks look like after a year or two of sustained fishing?

#### **Economic**

- How large is the market for Manila clams and how can we help ensure that good prices are sustained across the fishing season.
- How we get the most local benefit, in the form of jobs, investment and infrastructure from this fishery.

#### **Enforcement**

- What is the landing inspection process
- What controls are in place to ensure spatial management measures have a high level of compliance.

## **Working with the community**

As KEIFCA wants to work closely with the whole community on this project it is proposed to consult with all the stakeholders that have expressed an interest in the fishery. The consultation would last a month and would seek feedback on

- A proposed vision statement for the fishery
- Outline of the proposed trial
- Outline of the proposed application process

The results of the consultation will be included as part of the management proposal papers for discussion at the May meeting. Whilst stakeholder feedback on the number of applicants will be useful in reaching a decision, assessment of the abundance and distribution of clam stocks will be also be a vital consideration. A draft consultation document is included in Appendix 1.

### **Recommendations:**

The Authority is asked to **DISCUSS** and **AGREE** to undertake a consultation on the future Manila clam trial.

The Authority is asked to **DISCUSS** and **AGREE** the consultation document (Appendix 1).