

Agenda Item No. B3

By: Deputy Chief IFCO

To: Kent and Essex IFCA – 27 January 2026

Subject: **2026 TECFO Management**

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary:

This paper provides Members with an update regarding licencing for the TECFO 2024 fishery, preparations for the next 7-year licencing cycle and a proposal to increase the licence fee as set out in the TECFO Management Plan

Recommendations:

Members **AGREE**, subject to the consent of the Secretary of State, the increase of the TECFO 2024 licence fee by the CPI rate of 3.8%, to a total of £11,299.

TECFO 2024 fishery:

Background

The 2025 cockle fishery was the first to open under the new Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery (No. 2) Order 2024 (TECFO). The fishery opened on a delayed start date of the 17th of August and closed on the 31st of October 2025.

For the 2025 – 2031 7-year licencing cycle there are fifteen licence holders. This is fixed for the entirety of the 7-year cycle, with no change to that number being considered by the Authority. The number of licences will be reviewed prior to the next licencing cycle starting in 2032.

Licence renewal

On 26 November 2025, all licence holders were sent a letter advising that in accordance with article 5 (6) of The Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery (No. 2) Order 2024, applications were open for the annual renewal of the cockle licence.

Licence holders were informed that their current licence was due to expire on 31 December 2025 and article 7 of the order states that failure to apply for a renewal will mean the loss of the right to renew for the remainder of the 7-year period. Application forms for renewal of those licences were also sent to licence holders and were requested to be completed and returned by Friday 19 December 2025.

Planning for the next TECFO 7-year licencing cycle

With the establishment of the new Thames Estuary Cockle Regulating Order 2024 and the issuing of the first round of 7-year TECFO licences, attention can start to focus on the running of the new Order and setting up the processes to help the next 7-year licencing process run smoothly. As one of the major changes in the new Order has been the increase in the number of licences, it is sensible to start workstreams that collect evidence as to the impact of this additional licence from both an environmental and a socio-economic perspective. Officers would like to work with partners and the cockle industry to develop projects or systems that would help provide evidence to answer this question and aid decision making for the next 7-year cycle. The intention would be to outline potential ideas of how this could happen and bring some initial proposals to the May Authority meeting.

Although the management plan that accompanies TECFO 2024 does outline the Licence Allocation Process, members of the industry have contacted officers to help them understand and better prepare for the next licencing round that will take place in 6 years' time. In an effort to help the industry officers will look at producing a summary document that outlines the key sections and questions in the application process. The intention would be that officers would work with our legal team to produce a draft document that would be presented at our next meeting for the Authority to approve. Once the document is approved, officers would look to engage with the industry to help make future applicants are aware of the new system and the application scoring criteria. After talking to members of the cockle industry officers would most likely look to run a surgery style engagement exercise where possible future applicants would book a slot to talk though the guidance with officers.

Licence fees

Section 3 of the Sea Fisheries (Shellfish) Act 1967 allows KEIFCA to recoup the costs of setting up and running the order, as well as impose tolls for the benefit of the fishery. The licence fee is reviewed annually (currently specified as in May by the Management Plan) and applies a cost-recovery mechanism based on the costs of running the fishery (annual monitoring, management and enforcement costs) and furthering the vision and the objectives of the management plan.

The Management Plan sets out that as part of the annual licence fee review, The Authority will give consideration to increasing the licence fee at each review, in line with the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) or other appropriate measure of inflation.

Licence fees are required to be paid prior to issue of licences, which we envisage will be the 1 April 2026.

For the 2025 fishery the licence fee was set by the Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery (No.2) Order 2024 (as varied) at £10,885. When officers began developing the draft budget for 2026/2027 in October 2025, the CPI rate for the 12 months up to September 2026 was 3.8%. This is the figure which has been used for budgeting purposes. Therefore, the proposed licence fee for 2026/2027 is £11,299.

What happens next?

If the Authority is minded to follow the recommendation outlined in this paper, the TECFO 2024 requires that Ministerial consent is requested prior to the licence fee being varied. Therefore, officers will write to the Secretary of State following this meeting and, provided that a positive response is received, will then proceed to request payment from each licence holder and issuing of licences prior to the next meeting.

Recommendation:

Members **AGREE**, subject to the consent of the Secretary of State, the increase of the TECFO 2024 licence fee by the CPI rate of 3.8%, to a total of £11,299.

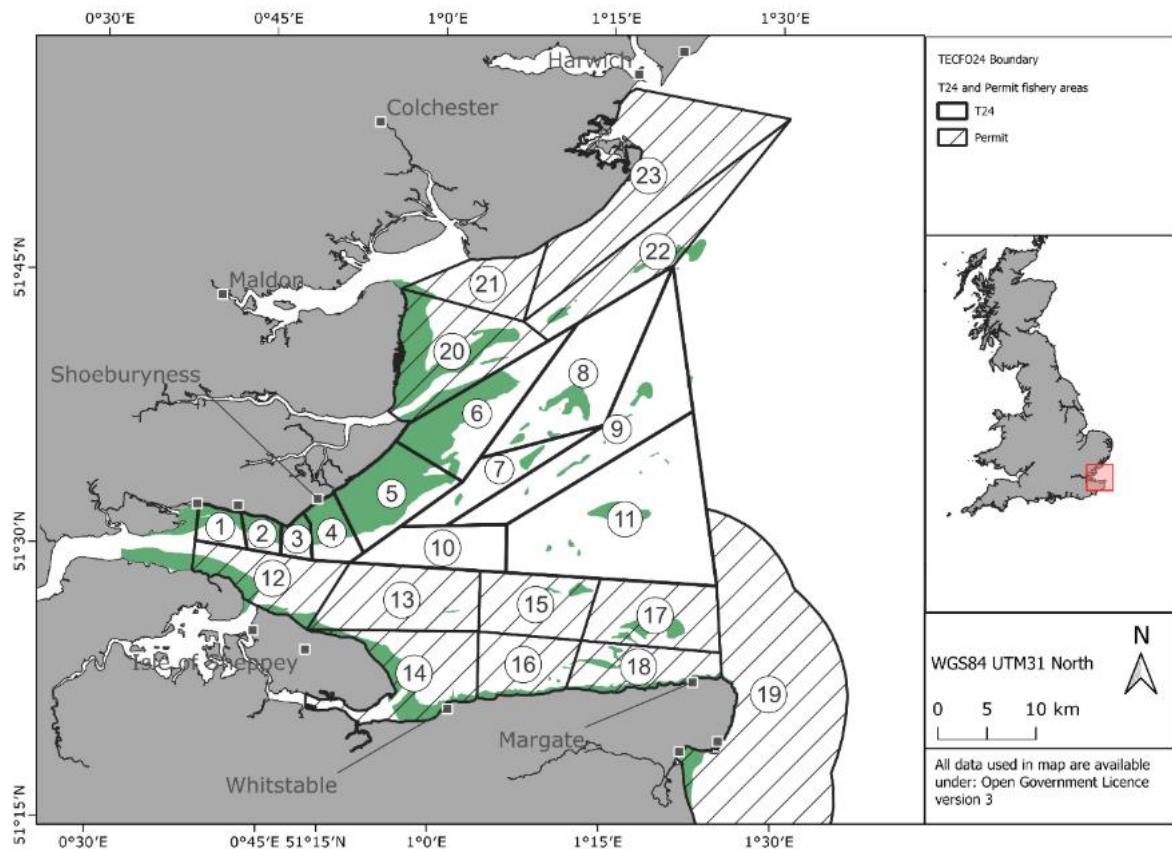


Figure 4: Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery (No. 2) Order 2024 (TECFO) area boundaries and the Permitted Cockle Permit Fishery boundaries as of 2025.