

By: Principal Scientific and Conservation IFCO/ Inshore Fisheries and
Conservation Officer

To: Kent & Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority
– 25 November 2025

Subject: **Small scale Manila clam Trial Update**

Classification **Unrestricted**

Recommendation:

This report is for **COMMENT** and **NOTING** only.

Setting up the 2025 Manila clam trial

As agreed at the last Authority meeting officers took the necessary steps to set up and run the 2025 manila clam trial, these included:

Agreeing an HRA for the trial - The Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) for the fishery was completed and submitted to Natural England (NE) who have agreed with the findings setting the conditions under which the fishery may proceed, especially given the time of year and potential conflict with over-wintering birds.

Getting the appropriate shellfish classifications to allow prospecting trips - Officers successfully obtained an agreement with the Food Standards Association (FSA), CEFAS and the local county council authorities (primarily London Port Health Authority) to transfer the shellfish classifications awarded to cockles over to Manila clams in the Buxey and the prospecting areas, namely, Southend Flats, Phoenix, Maplin West, Maplin Central West Cant and Scrapsgate and East Cant, Middle and Red Sand. This agreement meant that the trial could include three prospecting fishing trips, where fishers would be able to land catch from outside the two manila clam fishing areas as long as they came from

the classified shellfish beds (pink areas Figure 1)

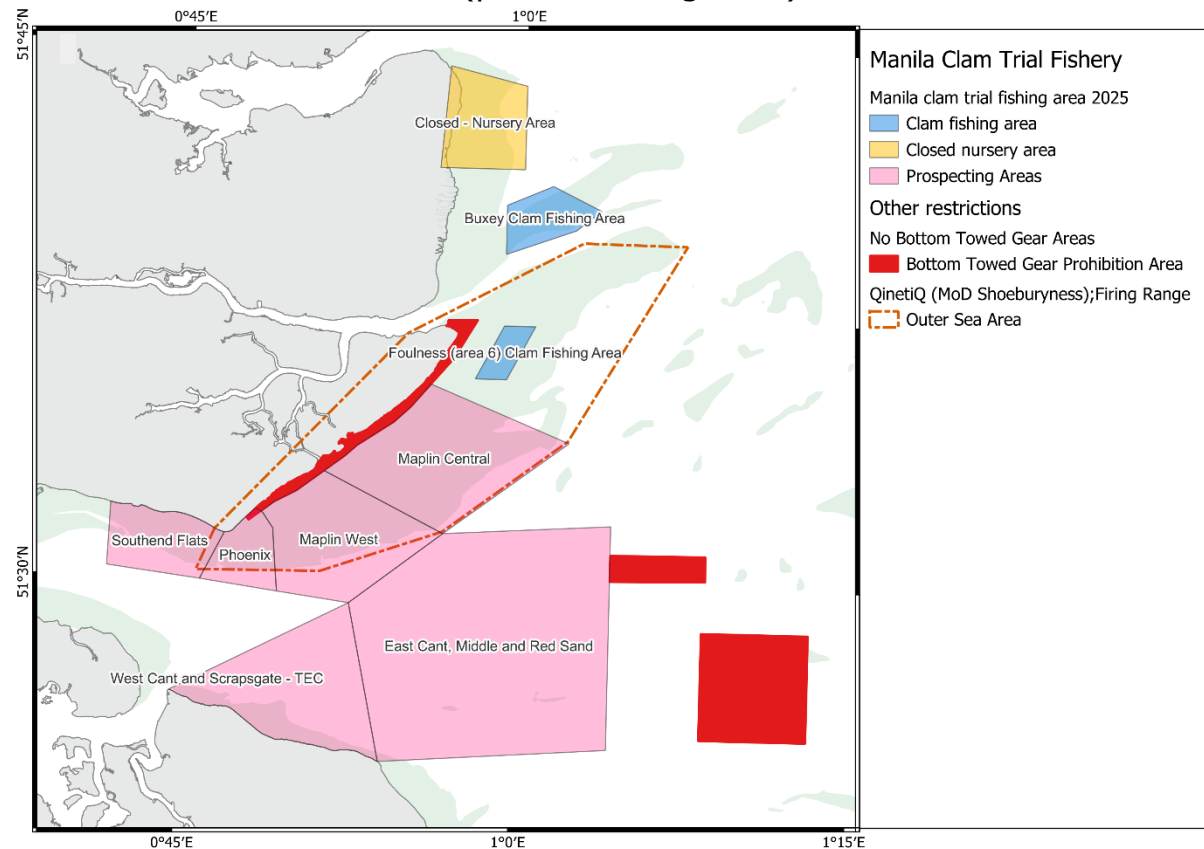


Figure 1. Map of Manila clam trial fishing areas 2025-2026, showing 1) clam fishing areas (blue), 2) Closed nursery area (yellow), 3) Prospecting Areas (pink), with respect to Bottom Towed Gear Prohibition Areas (red) and boundaries of the MOD firing range (dot-dashed lines).

Competing an assessment of the clam populations prior to the start of the trial – As well as undertaking a population assessment in spring (taken in conjunction with our cockle stock assessments), officers undertook a specific pre-trial survey in October that included areas inside and outside the fishing areas.

Initial results from the surveys showed a drop in the Manila clam populations compared to last year, and whilst both the Buxey and the Foulness beds still had significant numbers of Manila clams. The survey showed that the majority of over-35mm manila clams (above legal minimum size) were in the Foulness area.

As the trial is looking at fishery level impacts on the clam population, officers intend to undertake a further post-trial survey to help assess the impact of clam fishing.

Undertaking pre-trial checks and including the fitting of specialist tracking equipment – Officers have worked with the five trialists to make sure Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) units have been installed and biosecurity and gear inspections have been passed. All the trialists taking part are using water-injection batch dredges, following recommendations

from last year's trial outcomes. Some fishers innovatively reengineered their existing cockle dredge set ups to ensure compliance with the fishery's technical requirements

Running the 2025 Manila Clam trial

The trial fishery opened as planned on 3 November 2025. During Week 1, trialists were permitted to complete two trips with a maximum landing of 400 kg per trip. At the pre-fishery meeting with trialists on the 24 October, officers asked that, where weather conditions allowed, trialists fish across both beds to provide feedback on the stock and distribution of stock on the main trial areas: Area 20 (Buxey) and Area 6 (Foulness).

Four of the trialist vessels were ready to fish in Week 1. These four vessels had the REM units installed and working.

During Week 1, a total of five trips were undertaken between four of the trialist vessels: three trips to Area 20 (Buxey) and two trips to Area 6 (Foulness). One vessel completed their two permitted trips. Officers attended three landings of vessels during this period, where the total catch was weighed, and where officers went through a sample of manila clams for minimum size checks. These landings showed a mixed quantity of manila clam catches between trialists. All trialists were contacted after Week 1 to gather feedback on the main trial areas. The use of REM data from these trips is looking very positive.

In Weeks 2–3, trialists had been permitted to make up to four trips over the two-week period. However, poor weather conditions and market prices at the start of Week 2 prevented vessels from fishing as planned. KEIFCA had an operational plan to carry out damage rates during this period, with an intention to board and collect at least one damage rate per vessel, a continuation of the 2024 trial. However, as a result of bad weather conditions and poor market prices, FPV Vigilant, which had intended to collect damage rate data, was unable to do so due to the lack of fishing activity.

On 14 November 2025, KEIFCA set up a meeting with the manila clam trialists following concerns about current market and stock availability. This meeting was held to discuss feedback from the first couple of weeks of the fishery and viability of the trial moving forward. From this meeting, the following feedback was received:

- **Ground Conditions:** The feedback on the ground conditions for the Area 20 (Buxey) and Area 6 (Foulness) are what we expected from our surveys. According to the trialists, the ground on the Buxey is soft, muddy, and heavy with shell. It has been a poor year for cockle yield, and clam quality has also declined. Ground conditions

on Foulness are similar to last year, though shell presence has increased (showing 5–6 year classes). The inside ground is soft, while the ground on the southeast side of the fishing box is harder. The ground is more comparable to how the Buxey appeared last year. There is a noticeable reduction in stock across both beds and fishing is labour intensive.

- **Current Market Conditions:** The UK and export markets are saturated, with prices of manila clam falling to around half the price achieved in the 2024 trial. On top of that, the hospitality sector is struggling. The general view is that a spring fishery (March/April/May) would be more viable, particularly as this is when the UK market is not saturated by other domestic fisheries (e.g. Solent and Poole). Buyers that purchase to order have said they are not interested in buying for another 2/3 weeks and even after then, the prices will be low. An October fishery is also considered a potential alternative opportunity, allowing access to the market before other domestic fisheries open; however, this year the October window has already passed.
- **Considerations for a Spring Fishery:** Key factors include the manila clam spawning window and overall clam quality after the winter months and requirements relating to the HRA, although running a trial fishery outside of the winter months will automatically minimise the impact on over-wintering birds.
- **Trialist Agreement:** There is a shared agreement between trialists that any action should be taken collectively. Fisher's support pausing the trial and request that KEIFCA return with a proposed way forward after reviewing this feedback. A meeting will be held on the 21 November 2025 with trialists to put forward an agreed plan on the best way to move forward for this year's trial.

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