Agenda item B3

From: **KEIFCA Chief Fishery Officer**

To: Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority 22 March 2024

Subject: **SMALL SCALE MANILA CLAM TRIAL OUTLINE**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Summary: KEIFCA have been and are continuing to work closely with local fishermen to understand and explore manila clam beds in the Thames. Developing long term sustainable fisheries for this species is vital, so that we can create both long term investment and local jobs, as well as ensure that the fisheries are not over exploited or damage the marine protected areas that a lot of the clam beds are found in.

Recommendation: Members are asked to **COMMENT** on this report and **APPROVE** in principle the setting up of a manila clam trial fishery pending a final decision at their May meeting

Background

The Manila clam is a high-value seafood indigenous to the sub-tropical and temperate coasts of the western Pacific. Since the early 20th century, it has been spread by human activities and is now widely established in the northeastern Pacific, the Indian Ocean, the Mediterranean Sea. Manila clams were first introduced to the UK as an aquaculture species in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Initially it was believed that UK water temperatures would be too low for this species to spread outside the aquaculture facilities that started growing the clams. A combination of the species being more robust than first thought and water temperatures increasing significantly with global warming has led to the establishment of significant local populations in places like Poole Harbour and emerging populations along the South and Southeast coast.

Southern IFCA are the most experienced regional managers of this stock and KEIFCA has worked with them to better assess the manila clam stocks and to look at how these stocks can be fished and sustainably harvested in the future. Manila clams are found in similar areas to cockles and as such any fisheries management needs to consider the harvesting of both stocks and the issue of fishing for manila clams in the Thames was included as part of KEIFCA's detailed review of cockle fishery management 2021-23.

This is clearly an emerging market but to date local fishermen have only caught low numbers of manila clams as part of a cockle by-catch and there has been limited effort focused on manila clams specifically. Whilst manila clams can fetch a good price, that can be two to three times greater per kilo more than cockles) the clams do need to be over the 35mm minimum conservation reference size and need to be of a commercial yield. KEIFCA also has damage rate requirements in place for all bivalve species by virtue of an existing byelaw. KEIFCA has been collecting abundance and spatial distribution data for manila clams collected for six years (2018 – 2023) as part of our cockle bed surveys, and whilst the beds are definitely becoming more established there is less information on the commercial viability and the yields of these stocks.

Initial setup and premise

In anticipation of a future fishery, it is important to understand the impact and economic potential of different types of manila clam harvesting gear and operations before any legislation is developed. Using a scientific and fisheries management exemption under the cockle fishery flexible permit byelaw an area we are proposing setting aside an area for manila clam harvesting on an experimental or trial basis.

In anticipation of this we will be engaging with the local industry asking for expressions of interest from fishers who would like to take part is the trial. As the trial will be working in Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), data will also need to be gathered to help inform MPA assessments (HRA etc) as building up a detailed, systematic assessment of impact will be vital in allowing the new manila clam fishery to pass this significant requirement. There would also be a requirement for fishers taking part in the trial to collect and share a significant amount of information as to their fishing operation and would be required to have a working IVMS or VMS unit 'pinging' at a high hourly rate.

The trial would need to collect a wide range of information and data

1. Impact of manila clam fishing gear on the seabed
2. Assess whether fishing activity would pass an HRA
3. Damage rate on clams harvested (damage rate on any other shellfish harvested)
4. Speed of fishing/ efficiency rate of gear (on a range of ground types/ areas)
5. Efficiency in separating undersized clams, clams from cockles, and undersized cockles.
6. Quality of clams harvested
7. Profitability of fishing
8. Opportunities for local economy
9. Assess compliance/ enforcement of the fishery

Next steps

The intention is to undertake spring surveys as normal, and agenda papers would be submitted to the Authority meeting in May regarding the proposed management measures for the 2024 cockle fisheries and include a paper with greater detail on the manila clam trial. Until the surveys are completed and we have an idea of stock levels and CPUE it is difficult to give details of fishing

times/periods, however the expectation would be that the trial would take place in October after the cockle fishery, this would both give time for fishers to apply for any funding or grants.

After discussions with NE regarding the impact of the trial on the seabed both parties agreed that the number of vessels taking part in the trial needed to be limited to a small handful of boats (four to five). The shared expectation was also that the manila clam trial will be set up with the intention that the fishery will work to MSC standards.

Recommendation: Members are asked to **COMMENT** on this report and **APPROVE** in principle the setting up of a manila clam trial fishery pending a final decision at their May meeting