



Agenda item B4

By: Chief IFCO  
To: Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority – 12 September 2023  
Subject: **KEIFCA response to the 'front-runner' Fisheries Management Plans consultation**  
Classification Unrestricted

**Summary:**

This report provides members with an update on the six FMP consultations which officers will work through with Members for each FMP in a workshop section of the meeting. The results of the discussion will feed into the KEIFCA consultation reply to DEFRA.

**Recommendations:**

This report is for **DISCUSSING** and **COMMENT**.

**Background**

The Fisheries Act 2020 provides the framework to manage our fisheries as an independent coastal state outside of the EU Common Fisheries Policy. Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) are a requirement of the Act, the UK Joint Fisheries Statement, and a commitment in the England Environmental Improvement Plan 2023. Fisheries policy authorities (Defra, and the devolved administrations) have been tasked to develop and then publish forty three FMPs and DEFRA started this process with a first tranche of six 'frontrunner' FMPs.

## **Importance of the process/ opportunity of the process**

The creation of Fisheries Management Plans offers a new and exciting opportunity to manage our fisheries in a more coordinated way and provides regional organisations like IFCAs with an overarching framework that we can work within. For example, until the creation of FMPs there was no clear plan as to how whelk stocks outside the KEIFCA district would be managed. FMPs provide a structure by which fisheries, such as the whelk fishery, will be managed sustainably across the whole of their distribution in English waters. Such a plan will not only help provide a more reliable and sustainable fishery for whelk fishers but will also help ensure that species that play an important role within marine ecosystems are thriving.

Writing a plan that can pull together large regional variations around the coast, find a pathway through the complexity of data poor fisheries, struggling fishers and a marine ecosystem that is facing challenges from climate change and increased in marine developments, was always going to be difficult. The six FMPs have purposefully taken different paths to creation, in an attempt to explore the ways in which FMPs should be structured and used. At the same time as consulting on the detail of the plans in the 'frontrunner' process, DEFRA is also looking to see how the process of developing and implementing the plans could be improved.

## **Developing KEIFCAs reply to the consultations.**

From a KEIFCA perspective officers have tried hard to keep Members abreast of the FMPs as they develop and have invited project leads to present at our Authority meetings. We had originally planned to discuss the formal consultation of the six FMPs at our Authority meeting on the 14 July, however the consultation starting date was pushed back.

The consultation did start on the 17 July and will run until the 1 October. Whilst the consultation is very welcome, the volume of information to process and the level of detail contained in the plans and associated annexes has posed a significant issue. All six of the FMPs cover fisheries that take place in the KEIFCA district, and in total the text in the six FMP documents reaches 260 pages, 1,763 pages including annexes and 2,612 pages including impact assessments and environmental reports. The management of species like whelks, or bass, or sole has dominated previous KEIFCA meetings at different times and we could easily spend a whole meeting discussing just one FMP. It is also important to bear in mind that each management measure will go through a specific consultation process before becoming legislation.

After discussions with the Chairman, a decision was taken to discuss the FMPs in a more informal workshop format, with officers presenting the key points of the management plans and Members discussing the key issues in small groups before pulling together the important points officers will include the KEIFCA reply. In this way Members can ask questions and work through the logic and

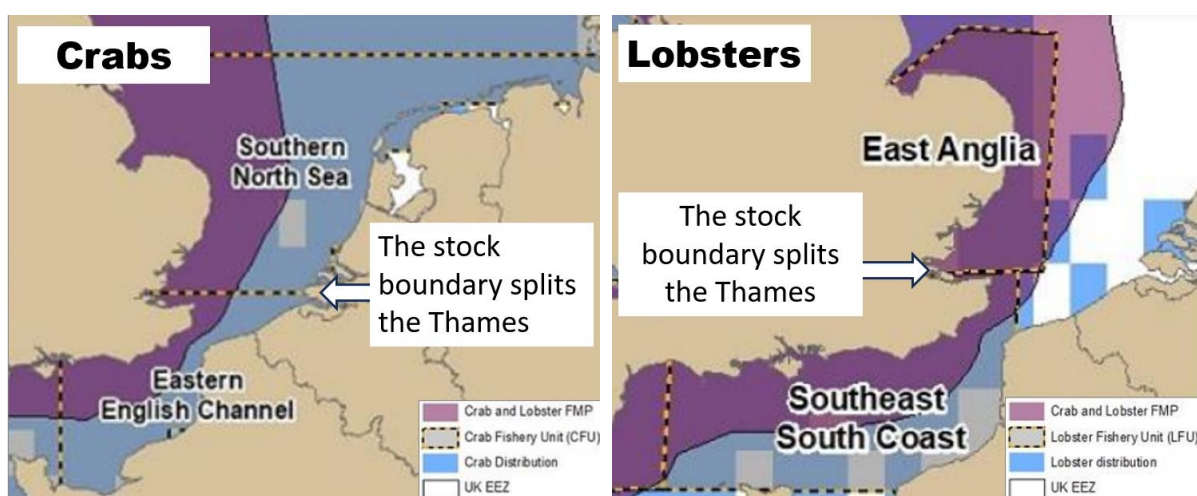
the impacts of the plans collaboratively and efficiently, whilst also providing an opportunity to explore relevant detail in depth.

Officers have included the executive summary of each FMP (they are quite repetitive when read together) and have included relevant action plan tables or management sections as important details of potential management measures are sometimes only addressed in these sections. Members will be emailed the full FMP documents and can follow the link to the consultation website <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fisheries-management-plans/fisheries-management-plans>.

### **Background - Crab and lobster FMP**

The crab and lobster FMP will cover stocks in English waters only. The Sea Fish Industry Authority (Seafish) worked closely with the Crab and Lobster Management Group, an industry-led advisory group, to draft the FMP.

Whilst the crab and lobster fisheries in the KEIFCA district are small when compared to fisheries in the North East or South West, the fisheries are important on a local scale throughout the district but especially for ports on the channel coast. When KEIFCA was formed it inherited a range of crab and lobster measures from the preceding Sea Fisheries Committees which are still applicable for the geographical location they were made. This has led to a mosaic of management measures in the district, however once it became clear that FMPs would be developed as part of the Fisheries 2020 Act, it made sense to feed into the FMP process and then review our management once we were clear on the proposed FMP management measures. In addition, as the diagram below highlights, the stock management units for crabs and for lobsters divide the Thames. If different management measures were developed for different stock units this would mean these stock boundaries could be the dividing line between different minimum sizes or different pot limits.



## **Background – Whelk FMP**

The whelk FMP will cover stocks in English waters only. Seafish worked closely with the Whelk Management Group, an industry-led advisory group, to draft the FMP.

The whelk fishery has become a key fishery for many local fishermen over the last decade and as other fisheries have moved further north or have become increasingly harder to access because of quota or technical measures the fishery has become more important.

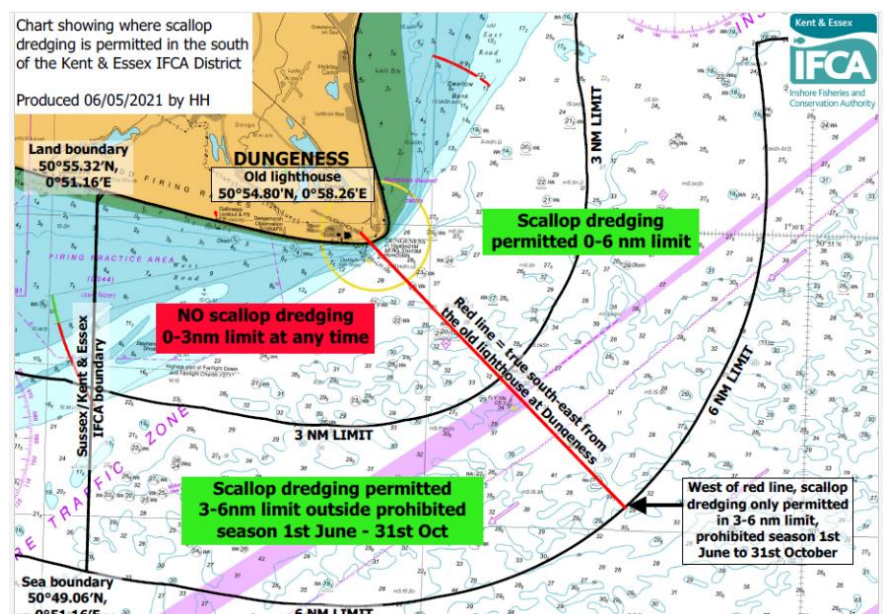
Since introducing an emergency byelaw in 2011 KEIFCA and its Members have invested a significant amount of time and resource into managing whelk stocks within the KEIFCA district. Flexible byelaws management measures have been assessed on a yearly basis, with the byelaw itself being remade and updated in 2020. The whelk fishery in the 6-12nm is also important, however there are no equivalent management measures here, apart from the requirement that whelks from this area need to be larger than the national 45mm shell length minimum size (KEIFCA 53mm shell length minimum size).

## **Background - King scallop FMP**

The king scallop FMP is a joint plan covering English and Welsh waters. The Scallop Industry Consultation Group (SICG) collaborated with Seafish to draft the FMP. The SICG working group is a collaborative body comprised of UK industry representatives and officials from all fisheries policy authorities.

A commercial scallop fishery takes place in the south of the KEIFCA district in an area from Folkestone to Rye Bay but focusing primarily on scallop beds off Dungeness. The main fleet is found in Rye Harbour which hosts a scallop festival in February each year. Typically, the inshore vessels which fish for scallops alternate between beam trawling, otter trawling and scallop dredging depending on the time of year and economics. Although primarily focusing on the larger more nomadic scallop fleet, the king scallop FMP will impact this local fishery and DEFRA have held a meeting in Rye specifically to discuss the FMP with them.

KEIFCA has several scallop byelaws, with a minimum size byelaw of 110mm, as well as a closed season and closed area byelaw.



## **Background – Bass FMP**

The bass FMP is a joint plan between Defra and the Welsh Government and covers stocks in English and Welsh waters. Policy Lab worked closely with stakeholders in 2022 to help develop recommendations for the bass FMP.

Bass is a very important fishery not just in KEIFCA but around the South coast and is targeted by both commercial fishers and recreational fishers. Until 2015 bass stocks were managed using a minimum size of 36cm and a series of bass nursery areas around the coast. Based on ICES advice and significant concerns regarding the future of the stock, a series of management measures were introduced to reduce fishing effort from both the commercial and recreational sector.

Since 2015, UK/EU measures have been in place to manage fishing pressure and agreed measures include:

- A minimum conservation reference size (currently 42cm)
- Closed seasons (currently February/March for both commercial and recreational fishers)
- Annual catch limits per vessel for three gear types - trawls/seines (3.8 tonnes), fixed nets (1.6 tonnes) and hook and line (6.2 tonnes). All other metiers are prohibited from landing bass
- For those fishing with trawls/seines and fixed nets, only bass bycatch may be landed, which is capped at a 5% live weight per trip for trawls/seines
- A track record for UK/EU vessels landing bass during the reference period of 1 July 2015 to 30 September 2016 is required for authorisation to use nets and hook and line gears
- Recreational bag limits are capped at two fish per day

KEIFCA officers promote and enforce these measures across the district and work closely with the MMO on targeted operations. Officers also enforce the bass nursery area legislation, however several of the power stations the nursery areas were designed around in the 1990's have been decommissioned and the functionality of the sites is now very different from their initial envisioned purpose. The introduction of the Medway No-take Zone by KEIFCA in 2016 was in no small part a response to protect key bass nursery habitat.

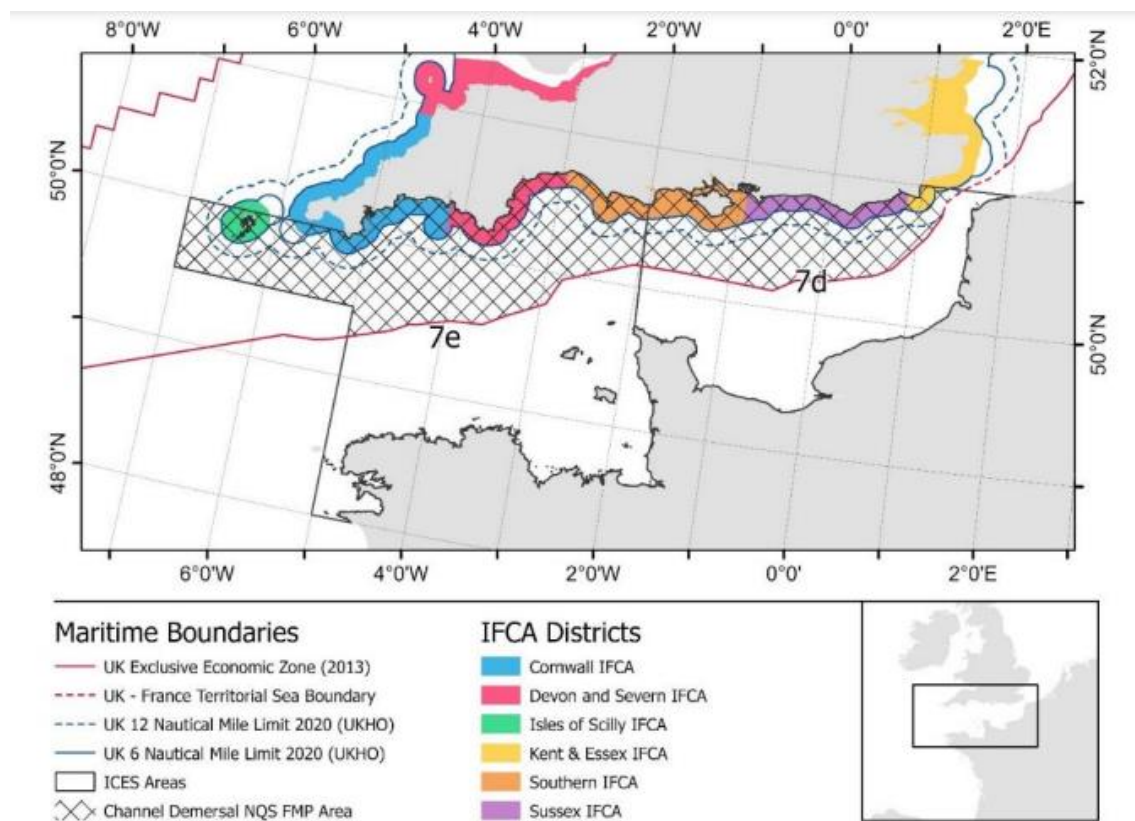
With its wide range of stakeholders in the fishery, bass management and the impact and equity of different measures on different stakeholders has been one of the main issues of contention for local commercial and recreational fishers.

## **Background - Channel demersal non-quota stocks (NQS) FMP**

The Channel demersal NQS FMP covers International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) divisions 7d (eastern channel) and 7e (western channel). It will include important demersal (bottom living) species without agreed catch limits (quota), such as:

gurnards          cuttlefish          squid                  octopus          john dory  
surmullet          lesser spotted dogfish

This FMP only covers a small area in the south of the KEIFCA district, with the majority of our district being within the Southern North Sea Non-Quota Demersal FMP which is currently under development and is due to be consulted on in 2024.



None of the species covered in this FMP constitute large fisheries in the district, although fishermen in the south of the district do target cuttlefish on occasion. With warming sea temperatures some of these species especially cuttlefish, squid and octopus could become more important in the future. KEIFCA do not have any specific regional management measures or byelaws for these species apart from a recreational minimum size for octopus at 750 grams.

## **Background - Southern North Sea & Eastern Channel mixed flatfish FMP**

The Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel mixed flatfish FMP covers the English waters within ICES divisions 4b, 4c and 7d. The plan will include the following flatfish species (quota and non-quota):

sole	plaice	halibut	witch	brill
dab	flounder	lemon sole	turbot	

The sole fishery is one of the most important commercial fisheries across the district as is targeted by both netters and trawlers. The level of sole stocks in the Thames has been of major concern to local fishermen for several years, with concerns across the industry that catches have dropped significantly. KEIFCA do not have any specific regional management measures or byelaws for this species apart from a recreational minimum size, however officers do enforce national/international technical conservation regulations that specify the fishing gear used to target sole.

### **Recommendations:**

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