

Agenda Item B4

By: Cockle Officer/Deputy Chief IFCO
To: Kent and Essex IFCA – 19 May 2026
Subject: **2026 Cockle Fishery Management**
Classification: Unrestricted

Summary:

This report provides a summary of the management of this years licenced cockle fishery inside the Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery (No. 2) Order 2024 area. Recommendations are included in this report, and members are asked to review and approve the recommended management of the 2026 cockle fishery.

Recommendations:

In respect of the Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery (No. 2) Order:

(a) The Total Allowable Catch (TAC) should be set initially at 4950 tonnes and that information related to the stocks will be continually reviewed throughout the season to ensure future sustainability.

(b) Allocation of additional TAC may be made in the event of significant new beds of cockles being located in the first four weeks of the fishery, to allow time for any necessary survey work. Reduction in TAC, and therefore a reduction in the number of trips, may be made in the event of very poor growth in the size of cockles.

(c) That the Chief IFCO be authorised, after consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairman, to implement changes to fishing controls to ensure future sustainability including for the purposes of (b). These will be communicated to Members following decisions being made.

(d) That the authority will allow for two trips, within the TAC allowance, to assist in active area management of lower density beds on the Maplin and Foulness Sands. These have been divided into weekly specified fishing periods which will run from 1800 hrs on Sunday to 1200 hrs on Friday. During these periods, licence holders will be permitted to make the following specified number of landings.

21 June – 3 July (2 weeks)	1 specified landing per period on area 4, 5, 6. All other areas will be closed.
----------------------------	---

(e) That the fishery will commence at **1800 hrs on 5 July 2026.**

(f) Provisional fishing allocations will be as follows, this will also be subject to further amendment;

The fishing season will be divided into weekly specified fishing periods which will run from 1800 hrs on Sunday to 1200 hrs on Friday and during these periods licence holders will be permitted to make the following specified numbers of landings (Reg. No. 7). This will maximise production when meat yields and quality are at their best.

5 July – 21 August (7 weeks)	2 specified landings per period
23 August – 4 September (2 weeks)	3 specified landings per period
6 September – 2 October (4 weeks)	2 specified landings per period

(g) The maximum quantity of cockles that may be landed or carried on board will remain at 13.6m³ /500 baskets per fishing trip (approx. equivalent 11 tonnes).

(h) As is usual it is recommended that sections of Areas 1, 2 and 3 should be closed at all times during the period June - September inclusive. These areas are defined as inshore sections of Areas 1, 2 and 3 from Two Tree Island at Leigh-on-Sea in the West to The Coastguard Station at Shoeburyness in the East and also within the area of Shoeburyness East Beach. (This closure applies only to the area inside the moorings and where there are no moorings closer to the shore than a distance of 300 metres measured from mean high-water mark.)

(i) A section of area 6 of the regulated fishery be closed under the reserves provision of the Thames Estuary Cackle Fishery (No2) Order 2024, for the purposes of conducting manila clam fishery trials.

1. Total Allowable Catch

Analysis of survey data shown in item B4 indicates that the recommended Total Allowable Catch (TAC) that can be taken from the beds will be 4950 tonnes. This is a conservative figure taking into account the current stock levels across multiple beds as well as the small size of most of the stock.

2. Cockle Licence Holders Meeting

On 7 May a meeting was held with the cockle fishery licence holders. The management for the 2026 fishery were discussed and included a run through of specific dates, area management and the number of trips per week.

The meeting outlined to industry that, following survey data and industry feedback which has identified a significant 'hot spot' concentration of effort in recent years, that specific area management is required for areas 4, 5, and 6 to ensure that other areas don't become built up with shell and other material. The pre-season trips,

outlined in the recommendations, will allow for focused management of these lower-density beds and help remove shell and other material to create space and encourage future stock growth of cockles in these areas. All vessels will have the opportunity to land any sizable stock harvested during these trips.

Officers will continue to work with industry prior to the fishery starting to lay out exactly how these trips will be conducted, and the Thames Estuary Fishermen's Association is meeting at the time of writing to help with this. The low-density area trips will come with management conditions which they are working with officers on, examples of which are below. Officers will liaise with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman with regards to implementation of these.

- i. The maximum permitted catch will remain at 13.6m³ /500 baskets per fishing trip.
- ii. All usual TECFO requirements e.g. gear type, landing notice, REM, etc., must be followed.
- iii. Vessels must work the ground in straight tows across areas 4, 5 and 6.
- iv. Vessels must include tows across the full width of the sands including as close to the shore as possible.

3. 2026 Fishery Management

Following consideration of the surveys discussed in the previous item I **RECOMMEND** the following management measures:

(a) The Total Allowable Catch (TAC) should be set initially at 4950 tonnes and that information related to the stocks will be continually reviewed throughout the season to ensure future sustainability.

(b) Allocation of additional TAC may be made in the event of significant new beds of cockles being located in the first four weeks of the fishery, to allow time for any necessary survey work. Reduction in TAC, and therefore a reduction in the number of trips, may be made in the event of very poor growth in the size of cockles.

(c) That the Chief IFCO be authorised, after consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairman, to implement changes to fishing controls to ensure future sustainability including for the purposes of (b). These will be communicated to Members following decisions being made.

(d) That the authority will allow for two trips to assist in active area management of lower density beds on the Maplin and Foulness Sands. These have been divided into weekly specified fishing periods which will run from 1800 hrs on Sunday to 1200 hrs on Friday. During these periods, licence holders will be permitted to make the following specified number of landings.

21 June – 3 July (2 weeks)	1 specified landing per period on area 4, 5, 6. All other areas will be closed.
----------------------------	---

(e) That the fishery will commence at **1800 hrs on 5 July 2026**.

(f) Provisional fishing allocations will be as follows, this will also be subject to further amendment;

The fishing season will be divided into weekly specified fishing periods which will run from 1800 hrs on Sunday to 1200 hrs on Friday and during these periods licence holders will be permitted to make the following specified numbers of landings (Reg. No. 7). This will maximise production when meat yields and quality are at their best.

5 July – 21 August (7 weeks)	2 specified landings per period
23 August – 4 September (2 weeks)	3 specified landings per period
6 September – 2 October (4 weeks)	2 specified landings per period

(g) The maximum quantity of cockles that may be landed or carried on board will remain at 13.6m³ /500 baskets per fishing trip (approx. equivalent 11 tonnes).

(h) As is usual it is recommended that sections of Areas 1, 2 and 3 should be closed at all times during the period June - September inclusive. These areas are defined as inshore sections of Areas 1, 2 and 3 from Two Tree Island at Leigh-on-Sea in the West to The Coastguard Station at Shoeburyness in the East and also within the area of Shoeburyness East Beach. (This closure applies only to the area inside the moorings and where there are no moorings closer to the shore than a distance of 300 metres measured from mean high-water mark.)

4. Licence Fees

As set out in the management plan the Authority will use the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) or another appropriate measure of inflation when considering increasing the licence fee at each review. It was agreed at the Authority meeting in January 2026 to increase the licence fees from £10,885 to £11,299 for the 2026/2027 fishery. Application to the Minister has been made and consent has been given. Payment has been requested from licence holders and licences will be issued to those who have made payment.

5. Remote Electronic Monitoring

In 2024, two vessels piloted the use of Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) within the fishery. This pilot was following on from trials of the system in Devon and Severn IFCA, Southern IFCA and in Jersey. The REM systems piloted were innovative and comprised of gear in water Bluetooth technology and visual verification cameras.

In 2025, officers briefed the Authority on the system and its use with the result that, following the success of the pilot, all fifteen licensed TECFO vessels voluntarily installed the REM system on board, with some financial assistance from KEIFCA. Throughout last season, officers worked closely with the vessels to continue the setup and finessing of the system on board each individual cockle vessel.

Now the TECFO fishery is starting to once again stabilise and all involved can start looking to the longer term, we want to continue our work with the industry over the coming year. Firstly, we want to work with licence holders to explore the potential of

the REM system with regards to flexibility of management. We also want to ensure that fishers are comfortable with how it is being used and implemented. Feedback will be given at the end of the fishery when the annual cockle report is submitted to the Authority.

6. Manila clam trial

Under the Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery (No. 2) Order 2024 KEIFCA has the power to create reserves within the area of the order for experimental, management or scientific purposes (article 8(1)(a)).

Power to create reserves

8. (1) *The Authority may from time to time designate and mark out as reserves, such parts of the regulated fishery as it thinks necessary for—*

- (a) experimental, management or scientific purposes, including the control of pests, control of competing species or control of diseases of cockles;*
- (b) cleansing and subsequent restocking with cockles and the protection of stock introduced;*
- (c) the collection of spat of cockles; or*
- (d) the deposit or re-laying of cockles for the purposes of cleansing before their removal from the regulated fishery.*

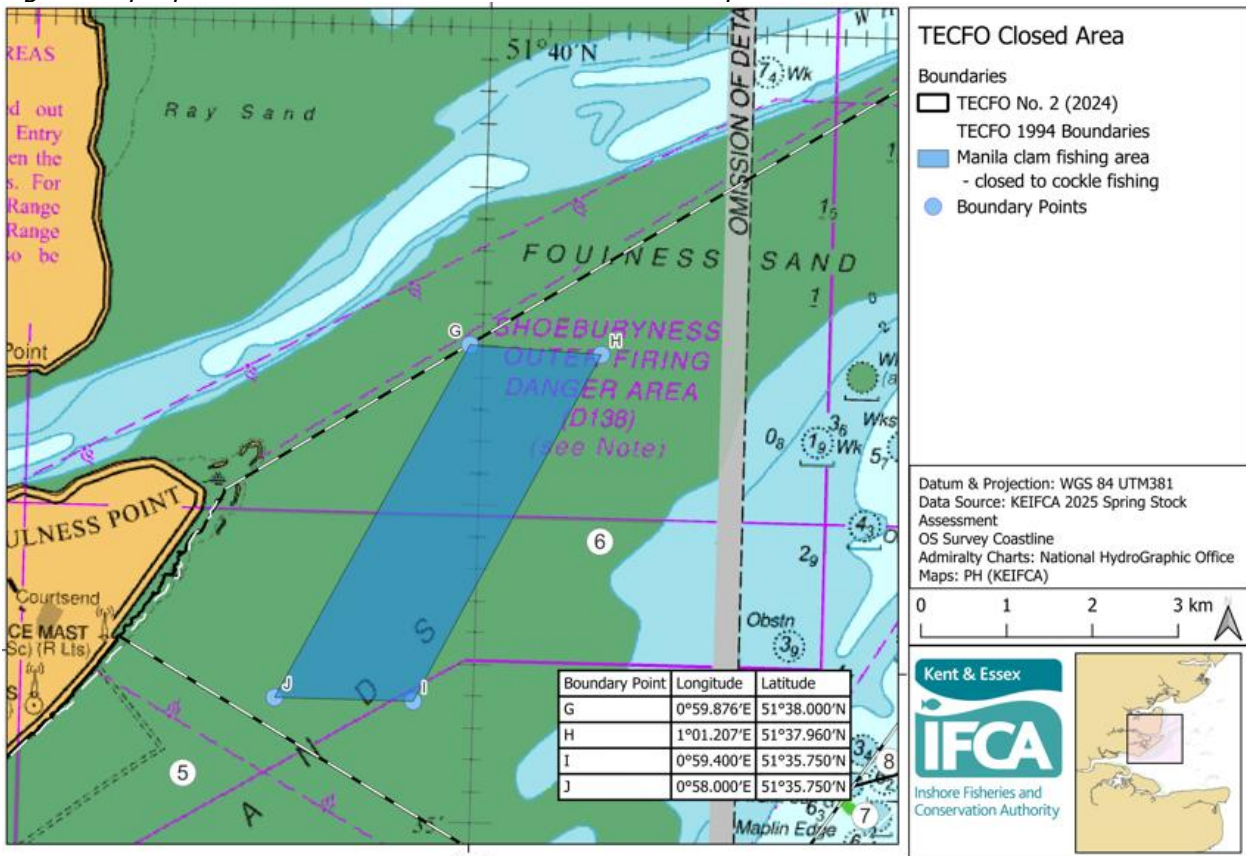
(2) The Authority may use such reserves for their designated purposes and prohibit their use for any other purpose connected with or ancillary to the dredging, fishing for or taking of cockles

The 2-year clam trial approved in August 2025 requires the trial areas to not be impacted by other fishing activities and the clam trial meets the criteria of being an experimental fishery. Within the reserve, fishing for cockles will not be permitted. It is recommended that the area in figure 1 is designated as a reserve under the provisions of TECFO 2024 for the length of the trial. At the end of the trial KEIFCA will review this approach.

For the purposes of the manila clam trial discussed I **RECOMMEND** the following management measure be **APPROVED** by the Authority:

- (i)** A section of area 6 of the regulated fishery be closed under the reserves provision of the Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery (No2) Order 2024, for the purposes of conducting manila clam fishery trials.

Figure 1. proposed areas to be closed under reserves provision for manila clam trial



7. Fishing in Marine Protected Areas

Under Regulation 48(3) of the Conservation (Natural Habitats) Regulations 1994, Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 the Authority is required to give notice to Natural England of intention to issue licences to fish for cockles within designated SSSI, EMS and Ramsar inter-tidal sites.

The Authority's management of the TECFO area cockle fishery is subject to a Habitat's Regulation Assessment as it occurs within several European Marine Sites (Essex Estuaries SAC, Mid-Essex Coast SPA, Thames Estuary and Marshes SPA and Outer Thames SPA). The required appropriate assessment of the impacts of this fishery on protected features has been updated from previous years to be consistent with the approach adopted under the Defra revised approach to managing fisheries in European Marine Sites. VMS data collected in previous years was a key part of the assessment, allowing a 'fishing footprint' to be calculated and further monitoring through VMS data will be an important factor in order to assess any impacts of cockle suction dredging.

EMS use.

The appropriate assessment for 2025 - 2031 was submitted to Natural England for advice prior to the 2025 fishery and received a positive response from Natural England. This appropriate assessment is still valid as no substantive changes have been made to the management of the fishery.

Recommendations:

In respect of the Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery (No. 2) Order:

(a) The Total Allowable Catch (TAC) should be set initially at 4950 tonnes and that information related to the stocks will be continually reviewed throughout the season to ensure future sustainability.

(b) Allocation of additional TAC may be made in the event of significant new beds of cockles being located in the first four weeks of the fishery, to allow time for any necessary survey work. Reduction in TAC, and therefore a reduction in the number of trips, may be made in the event of very poor growth in the size of cockles.

(c) That the Chief IFCO be authorised, after consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairman, to implement changes to fishing controls to ensure future sustainability including for the purposes of (b). These will be communicated to Members following decisions being made.

(d) That the authority will allow for two trips, within the TAC allowance, to assist in active area management of lower density beds on the Maplin and Foulness Sands. These have been divided into weekly specified fishing periods which will run from 1800 hrs on Sunday to 1200 hrs on Friday. During these periods, licence holders will be permitted to make the following specified number of landings.

21 June – 3 July (2 weeks)	1 specified landing per period on area 4, 5, 6. All other areas will be closed.
----------------------------	---

(e) That the fishery will commence at **1800 hrs on 5 July 2026**.

(f) Provisional fishing allocations will be as follows, this will also be subject to further amendment;

The fishing season will be divided into weekly specified fishing periods which will run from 1800 hrs on Sunday to 1200 hrs on Friday and during these periods licence holders will be permitted to make the following specified numbers of landings (Reg. No. 7). This will maximise production when meat yields and quality are at their best.

5 July – 21 August (7 weeks)	2 specified landings per period
------------------------------	---------------------------------

23 August – 4 September (2 weeks)	3 specified landings per period
-----------------------------------	---------------------------------

6 September – 2 October (4 weeks)	2 specified landings per period
-----------------------------------	---------------------------------

(g) The maximum quantity of cockles that may be landed or carried on board will remain at 13.6m³ /500 baskets per fishing trip (approx. equivalent 11 tonnes).

(h) As is usual it is recommended that sections of Areas 1, 2 and 3 should be closed at all times during the period June - September inclusive. These areas are defined as inshore sections of Areas 1, 2 and 3 from Two Tree Island at Leigh-on-Sea in the West to The Coastguard Station at Shoeburyness in the East and also within the area of Shoeburyness East Beach. (This closure applies only to the area inside the moorings and where there are no moorings closer to the shore than a distance of 300 metres measured from mean high-water mark.)

(i) A section of area 6 of the regulated fishery be closed under the reserves provision of the Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery (No2) Order 2024, for the purposes of conducting manila clam fishery trials.

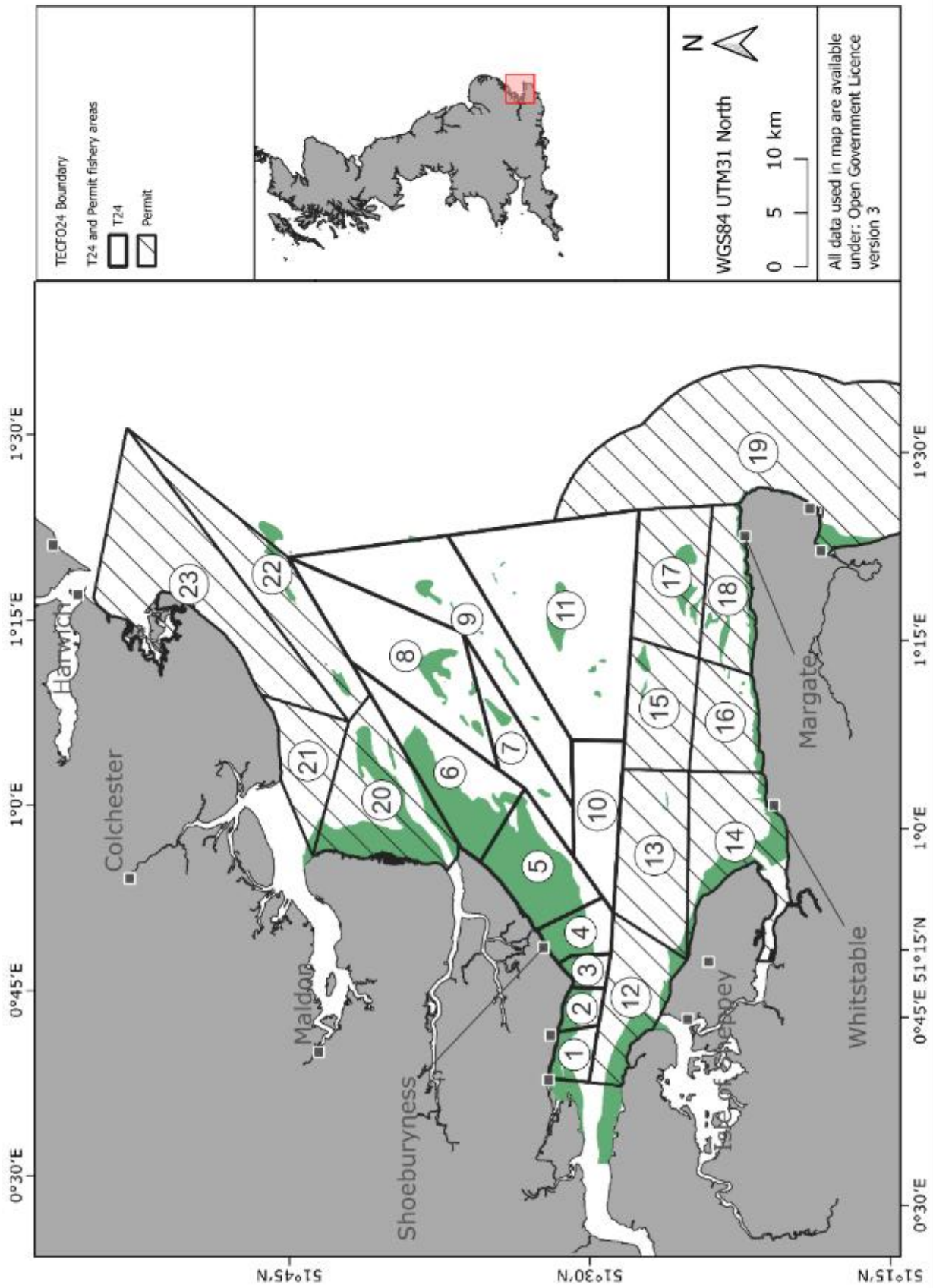


Figure 1: Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery (No. 2) Order 2024 (TECFO) area boundaries and the Permitted Cockle Permit Fishery boundaries as of 2025.