



Agenda item B4

By: Assistant Chief IFCO

To: Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority – 26 May 2022

Subject: **PERMITTED COCKLE FISHERY SURVEYS**

Classification Unrestricted

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Summary: To report on the surveys for the 2022 Permitted Cockle Fishery

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## **1. Permitted Cockle Fishery 2021**

The permitted cockle fishery was not opened during 2021 due to insufficient numbers of cockles above the minimum landing size of 16mm being found during the annual surveys. All permit fees were refunded as per the byelaw requirements.

## **2. Appropriate Assessment**

The Authority is required 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 to give notice to Natural England of intention to issue permits to fish for cockles within designated SSSI, SPA and Ramsar inter-tidal sites. The Authority is also required to submit an "Appropriate Assessment". This assessment includes survey data, fishery monitoring and details of mitigation implemented to ensure that there is no adverse impact upon these sites as a result of the Authority's action. The Appropriate Assessment and formal notification have been provided to Natural England and a response is currently awaited.

### **3. Number of Permit Applications**

The process for the management of this fishery is that anyone wishing to apply for a permit is required to apply before 31 March in that year and all stock assessment surveys are completed before the May Authority meeting. This ensures that the Authority can be presented with a complete picture of the fishery, including the amount of stock available and the number of vessels wishing to work it.

Between 2011 and 2021 an average of 34 fishing vessels have applied to work the cockle fishery in each year. For 2022, the number of permit applications is 26. Twenty five of these applications are for Category 1 permits which would be permitted, should the fishery open, to take up to 13.6m<sup>3</sup> per trip. One of these applications is for the smaller Category 2 permit, which permits up to 6.8m<sup>3</sup> per trip.

### **4. Spring 2022 Cockle Stock Surveys**

Stock surveys commenced at the beginning of April 2022 and are still ongoing due to patrol vessel breakdowns. They are scheduled to be completed by the end of May. At this time of year, the cockles are coming into condition for their spring spawning following the winter dormant period. These surveys use Day Grabs deployed from both FPV Tamesis and FPV Nerissa, and cover a total area of 37.6 km<sup>2</sup> (14.5 miles<sup>2</sup>).

The areas surveyed cover the Buxey and Ray Sands, Minnis Bay and Leysdown. A survey was also conducted for the second year running on a potential new bed in Area 14, South Margate Sands. These areas include all of the current main production areas outside of the TECFO (a chart showing the production areas is attached at Appendix A).

As reported above the Authority's management of the fishery is subject to an Appropriate Assessment which has been provided to Natural England. This includes details of specified management criteria.

Analysis of the survey data collected so far has been completed. The survey shows that, the Ray, Dengie and Buxey Sands contain a sufficient number of cockles suitable for commercial harvesting, with approximately 400 tonnes being available for a provisional TAC which is above the 350 tonnes specified in the Management Plan as being required to open an area. Minnis Bay does contain very good densities of cockles but the site is only 1.2km<sup>2</sup> in size and requires other areas to be open at the same time to permit access by a fleet of the 26 permit holders.

In summary, Area 7 does meet the requirements of the management plan which allow it to be opened to commercial harvesting. Minnis Bay and Pegwell Bay also contain some good numbers of cockles but not in sufficient numbers to allow a trip of the fleet, primarily due to the size of

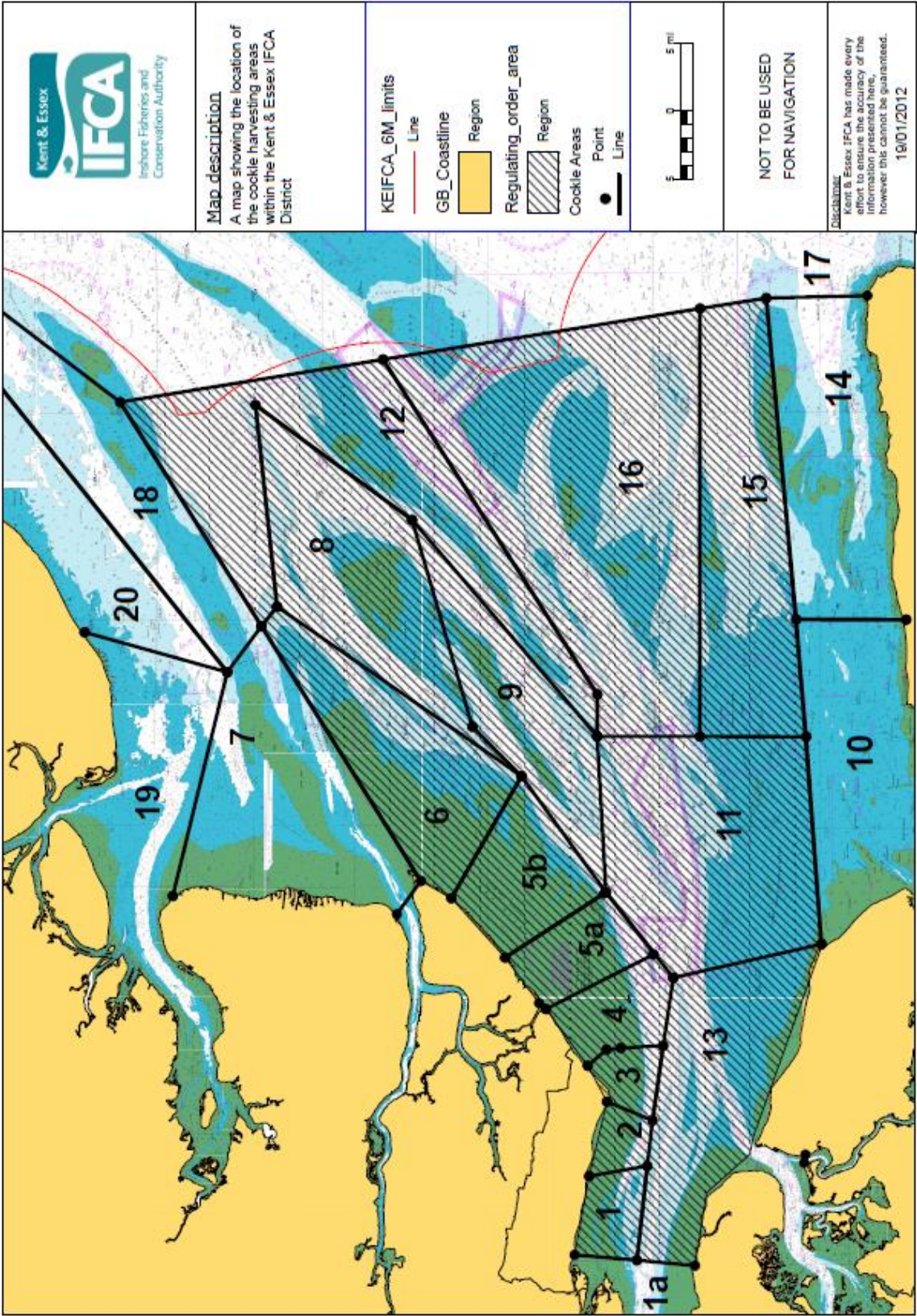
the beds. South Margate Sands does not contain sufficient stocks to be opened to the 26 vessels fleet.

## **5. 2022 Fishery Management**

Management of this fishery for 2022 will be considered at the 14 June 2022 extraordinary meeting of the Authority, where a potential for a small-scale trial as part of the cockle fishery review will be discussed as well as other options for utilising this stock moving forwards.

**Recommendation – For NOTING and COMMENT only**

Appendix A



A chart showing the cockle production areas within the Kent and Essex IFCA District

## **Appendix B**

Responses received for additional licenses