

From: Scientific and Conservation IFCO

To: Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority –
28 January 2025

Subject: Small scale manila clam trial October 2024, public summary
report

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Summary:

Members will be provided a copy of the Manila Clam Trial 2024 Public Summary Report for their approval.

Recommendations:

The Authority is asked to **COMMENT** on and **APPROVE** the report and its recommendations.

1. A 2025 trial fishery focussing on fleet level impacts and understanding of the fishery.
2. Further experiments and trials focus only on water injection batch dredges. They were shown to be the most viable gear type out of the three tested and thus should move forward into future trials.
3. Cockle data continues to be collected throughout future trials. Close monitoring of the impact of Manila clam harvesting on the existing cockle fishery is important, and so the ability for clam fishing and sorting gear to separate cockles from clams should be continuously assessed.
4. A standard riddle bar spacing be carried through to future trials, the specification subject to the results from the riddle study. Standardising bar spacing going forward will allow for a more robust assessment of the sorting capabilities of a Manila clam fishing fleet.

Background:

The Manila clam (*Ruditapes philippinarum*) is a high-value seafood introduced to the UK as an aquaculture species in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Over the last few years Manila clams have become ever more abundant in the Thames and have the potential to become a viable future fishery. At the March 2024 KEIFCA meeting, the Authority agreed to run a trial to understand the impact and economic potential of different types of Manila clam harvesting gear and operations before any legislation is developed.

The trial started on the 1 October 2024 and concluded on the 25 October 2024. A vast amount of data was collected, with officers conducting 28 boardings and 4 landings, measured 8 sets of fishing gear and processed 165 samples including over 18,500 clams. At the conclusion of the trial, a wrap-up meeting was held with all trialists. In this meeting initial feedback on what worked and didn't work was shared, and a strategy for report-writing discussed.

There was an in-person, follow-up meeting with all trialists on the 17 January 2025. Trialists were shown the main contents of the report, with no concerns raised as to what was included. The initial direction of the 2025 trial was also discussed, in order to capture any industry insight into the appropriate next steps.

Post-trial Interviews:

Since the last Authority meeting, officers have conducted post-trial interviews with seven of the eight trialists. The questions from these interviews focussed on gathering information on the experience of fishing for and selling Manila clams, their perspectives on the viability of a future fishery, and feedback on how KEIFCA did setting up and running the trial. The interviews provided essential, in-depth information, allowing KEIFCA to incorporate industry experience into its assessment of the Manila clam trial.

Natural England:

Natural England (NE) has been kept updated with the initial results of the trial and informed of the initial plans for the general direction of next year's trial. There have been no initial concerns from NE, and KEIFCA plan to continue working closely with them in order to ensure that all trials are compatible with the conservation objectives of MPAs that overlap with trial areas. Officers are also considering compiling a technical report that would go into the data collected in more depth. As this report would contain commercially sensitive information careful consideration needs to be given in how the report is structured, discussed and used to inform future management decisions.

The Report:

Officers have been working through a large amount of data and have summarised the high-level conclusions in the public summary report, attached as Appendix 1. This report contains data appropriate for public consumption.

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