

From: Chief IFCO

To: Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority –
 17 September 2024

Subject: Small scale Manila clam trial outline

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Summary:

In May nearly 40 fishers expressed an interest in taking part in a Manila clam trial. Following the process agreed at the May Authority meeting, 8 trialists have been selected from the 15 that applied. The paper outlines in detail how the trial will be run and outlines the next steps following the trial.

Recommendations:

Working in the boxes outlined in Fig.1, the trial will be divided into weekly specified periods.

The first week will start on at 05:00 on Tuesday 1st October and run until 18:00 on Saturday 5th October. Trialists will be allowed a maximum of 5 trips during this period for the purpose of setting up and testing gear and no landings would be permitted.

For each of the subsequent weeks (Week 2 – Week 4) the trial will run from 18:00 hrs on Sunday to 12:00 hrs on Friday and the trialists will be permitted to make the following specified number of landings, with the following specified quantities of Manila clams (*Ruditapes philippinarum*) per landing.

	Start	Finish	No. Trips	Landings permitted per trip
Week 1	1 Oct @ 05:00	5 Oct @ 18:00	5	NO LANDINGS
Week 2	6 Oct @ 18:00	11 Oct @ 12:00	2	300 kg
Week 3	13 Oct @ 18:00	18 Oct @ 12:00	2	300 kg
Week 4	20 Oct @ 18:00	25 Oct @ 12:00	2	500 kg

Introduction

Manila clams (*Ruditapes philippinarum*) have become ever more abundant in the Thames and have the potential to become a future fishery. As outlined at previous

meetings 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, we have developed and started to implement the setting aside of an area for Manila clam harvesting on an experimental or trial basis.

Following agreement at the March Authority meeting, officers engaged with the local industry and asked for expressions of interest from fishers who would like to take part in the trial. As nearly 40 fishers (38) expressed an interest, the Authority developed an application process to select a handful of trialists to fill the 4-5 spaces that had been agreed with Natural England.

Setting up the trial

All the fishers who had expressed an interest were invited to apply, and from these, fifteen fishers submitted a formal application to participate in the trial. Due to a limited number of places on the trial, these applications were assessed and ranked by a panel of KEIFCA members (including Rob Clark from the AIFCA). Overall, the standard of applications was very high, and it was clear that several applicants had spent time thinking about and planning their gear construction and potential markets. Having received the applications and following discussions with Natural England, KEIFCA managed to increase the number of trialists to 8. Following the process agreed by the Authority (that the number of trialists planning to use hydraulic suction dredges was limited to two), six vessels planning to use batch dredges were awarded a place on the trial as well as two vessels planning to use hydraulic suction dredges. Increasing the number of trialists allows us to test a diverse and wide range of business models and fishing gears.

After phoning up and informing all the successful and unsuccessful candidates, our lead officer on this project Katherine Stuart, visited each successful trialist to discuss the specifics of the trial and answer any questions. On 28th September KEIFCA held a face-to-face meeting with the trialists in Whitstable to run through the detail of the trial and discuss how the trial will collect evidence required by Natural England (NE). To keep those fishers interested in the trial, but not actively involved in it, up to date with the progress of the project, officers have developed a newsletter that will be updated at key times throughout the trial (Appendix 1).

Outline of the trial

As agreed at the May meeting, the trialists will be allowed to sell their catch, however they will be expected to provide information to help answer the 9 areas we need to investigate. The information provided will be included in public reports and we intend to present a summary of the findings at the January 2025 Authority meeting. Understanding the potential markets for Thames Manila clams is a key component of this trial, and we will require all trialists to pass on relevant information and help us with this part of the project.

The trial will aim to collect a wide range of information and data:

- Impact of Manila clam fishing gear on the seabed
- Assess whether fishing activity would pass an HRA
- Damage rate on clams harvested (damage rate on any other shellfish harvested)

- ❑ Speed of fishing/ efficiency rate of gear (on a range of ground types/ areas)
- ❑ Efficiency in separating undersized clams, clams from cockles, and undersized cockles.
- ❑ Quality of clams harvested
- ❑ Profitability of fishing
- ❑ Opportunities for local economy
- ❑ Assess compliance/ enforcement of the fishery

Updated detail of the trial

Following the analysis of survey data, KEIFCA entered into discussions with NE as to the possibility of including an additional trial area on the Maplin Sands. After a significant amount of extra work by our science and conservation team in submitting an HRA, NE has confirmed that it is happy for the trial to go ahead within the agreed coordinates.

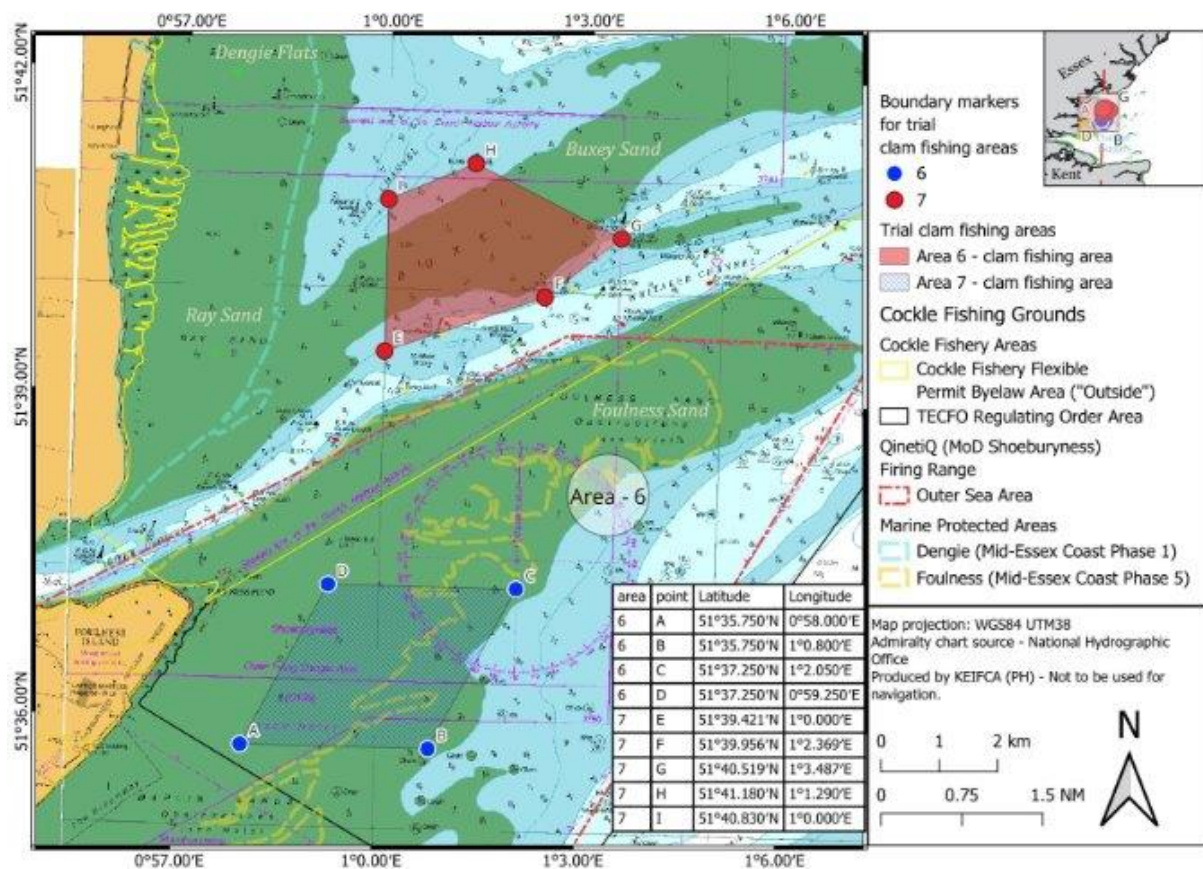


Fig.1 Plotted coordinates of proposed Manila Calm trial areas

Expanding the trial to include areas within the new cockle regulating order does set up a new array of challenges, however there is no disputing the year-on-year spread of Manila clams on the Maplin sands. The possibility of the new area has been discussed and is supported by the trialists and the trial is targeted at removing clams and returning cockles.

The trial will occur in a four-week block between the 1st -29th of October, all clams landed must be over 35mm in length and all trialists must pass the necessary pre-trial checks (a working Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) 'pinging' at the required rate, MCA paperwork and biosecurity).

Week 1: Five trips for the purpose of setting up and testing gear. No landings permitted.

Week 2: Two trips per week. 300 kg landings permitted per trip, per boat.

Week 3: Two trips per week. 300 kg landings permitted per trip, per boat.

Week 4: Two trips per week. 500 kg landings permitted per trip, per boat.

Next Steps

Following the trial, participants will be asked to complete a questionnaire or take part in an interview, so we can collate feedback on the trial and key socio-economic data. Officers will then look to produce a report on the trial which will be presented at a workshop held in January or February next year.

The next significant step will be to run specific trials to measure and record the impact of the Manila clam fishing gear on the seabed. KEIFCA officers have already started developing methods and techniques to collect this information in preparation for trial hopefully sometime in the spring or early summer before the start of the cockle season.

As previously outlined; after discussing the trial with our legal team, we need to make it very clear to all prospective applicants that taking part in the trial does not create or infer any legitimate expectation of future access to any possible clam fishery or to any future trials. If these trials are successful and more trials are undertaken in the future it would be the intention of the Authority to run a new application process using criteria deemed relevant by the Authority, that would be open to all those that expressed an interest. Looking further forward and if things go to plan, our current thinking would be to continue the trial into next year and hopefully expand the trial so that it provides 'fishery level' evidence rather than 'boat level' evidence. The ambition would be to run the trial in October/ November 2025.

Recommendations:

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