



Agenda item B5

By: Assistant Chief IFCO

To: Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority – 22 May 2024

Subject: Cockle TECFO 1994 Licenced Fishery Management

Classification **Unrestricted**

Summary:

This report provides summary of the management of the 2024 licenced cockle fishery inside the Thames Estuary Fishery Order area. Recommendations are included in this report and members are asked to review and approve this recommended management of the 2024 cockle fishery.

Recommendations –

Note: If additional licences are issued it will be necessary to review management allocations.

In respect of the Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery Order:

(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 fishery will commence at 1800 hrs on 2 July 2023.

(e) 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.

2 July – 28 July (4 weeks)	2 specified landings per period
30 July – 25 August (5 weeks)	3 specified landings per period
27 August – 29 September (4 weeks)	2 specified landings per period

(f) 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).

(g) All areas of the TECFO will remain open, with the exception of Area 15 which remain closed for at least the first four weeks of the fishery and will be opened subject to further survey work by KEIFCA.

(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.)

In respect of the issuing of additional Cockle Fishery Licences:

(i) That the number of licences should be restricted.

1. Cockle licence holders meeting

On 7 May a meeting was held with the cockle fishery licence holders. The management of the 2024 fishery along with specific dates for the fishery and the number of trips per week were discussed and the details reported here were agreed by the majority of the licence holders.

2. 2024 Fishery Management

Following consideration of the surveys discussed in the previous item I **RECOMMEND** the following management measures. If additional licences are issued it will be necessary to review management allocations.

(b) Allocation of additional TAC may be made in the event of significant growth of cockles being seen across beds. 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 fishery will commence at 1800 hrs on **2 July 2024**.

(e) 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 1900 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.

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(f) 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).

(g) All areas of the TECFO will remain open, with the exception of Area 15 which will remain closed for at least the first four weeks of the fishery and will be opened subject to further survey work by KEIFCA

(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.)

Note: Within Areas 1 and 2 Southend Borough Council licencing conditions apply.

The Authority is asked to **APPROVE** the above recommendations.

3. Licence Fees

The licence fee was discussed and agreed by the Authority at the November 2023 Authority meeting as licences were issued earlier than usual to provide sufficient time this year for the new T24 regulating order application system.

4. Consideration of Issuing Cockle Fishery Licences - Formal Procedure

As required by the Order, consultation has taken place with those likely to be substantially affected by a limitation on the number of licences issued. This consultation was undertaken via a letter sent to interested parties, who were made aware that they could provide representation in writing; any representations received will be provided to Members at the meeting for consideration.

Consideration will need to be given to the level of stocks and future prospects for the fishery. Last year the Authority resolved that no additional licences would be granted for the 2023 fishery and that licences would only be issued to the existing 14 licence holders. This is the last year of TECFO 1994 and the new licensing system for T24 will start later this year ahead of the 2025 fishery. The new application system provides far more opportunities for new applicants and the Authority has previously resolved to issue 15 licences for the 2025 fishery, subject to the September 2024 stock assessment.

Once a decision has been made by the Authority it will be necessary to inform the Minister to allow directions to be given if so decided under Section 4(5) of the Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery Order.

Recommendations:

- (i)** That the number of licences should be restricted.

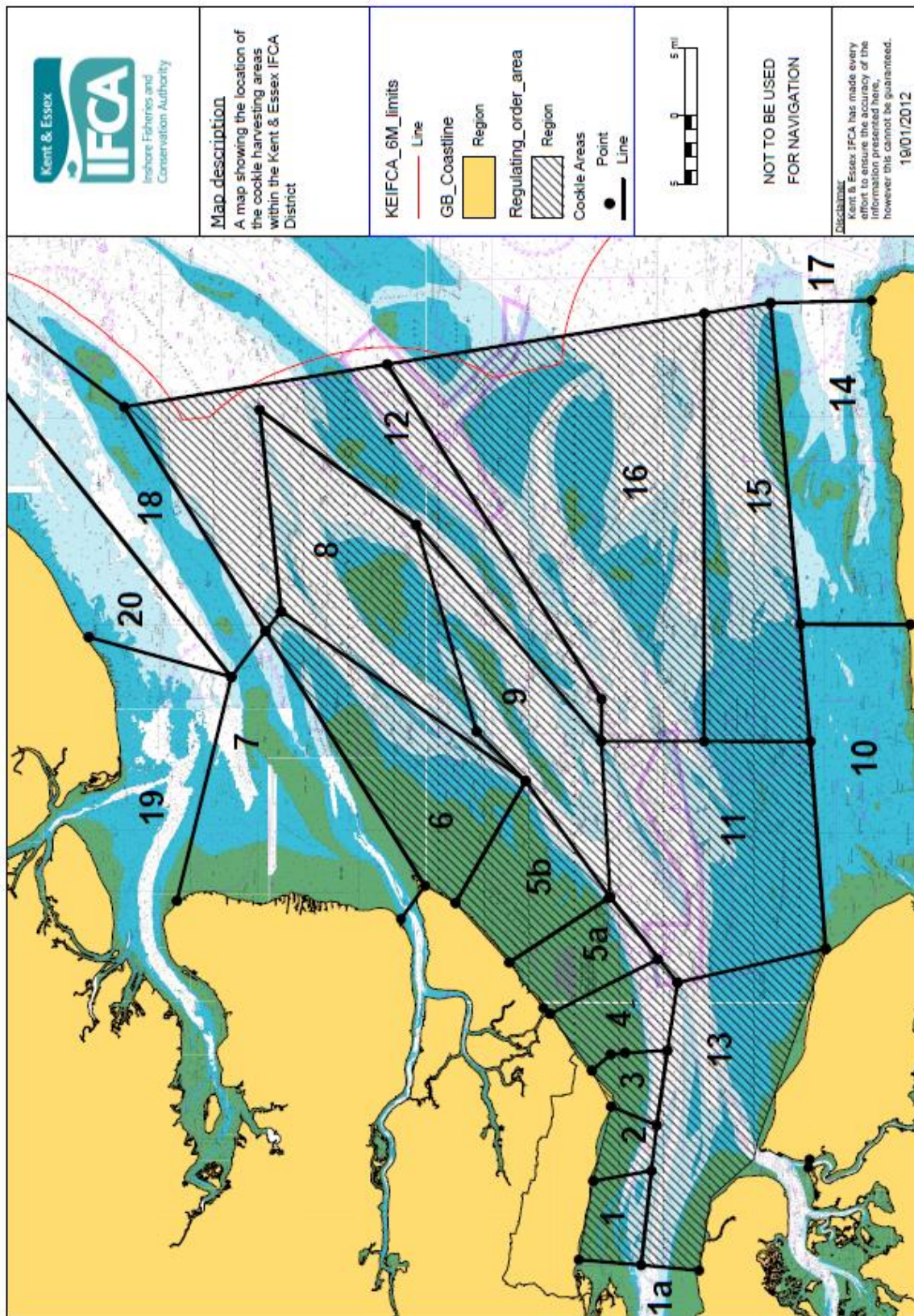
5. Fishing in Marine Protected Areas

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 of VMS data will be an important factor in order to assess any impacts of cockle suction dredging.

The appropriate assessment for 2022 - 2024 was submitted to Natural England for advice prior to the 2022 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.

Appendix A



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