

Agenda item B5

By: Deputy Chief IFCO

To: Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation  
Authority – 18 June 2025

Subject: Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery Order 2024 – Management  
for the 2025 fishery

Classification **Unrestricted**

**Summary:**

This report provides a summary of the management of the 2025 licenced cockle fishery inside the Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery Order 2024 area. Recommendations are included in this report and Members are asked to review and approve this recommended management of the 2025 cockle fishery.

**Recommendations –**

- (a)** The Total Allowable Catch (TAC) should be set initially at 5,940 tonnes and that information related to the stocks will be continually reviewed throughout the season to ensure future sustainability.
- (b)** There will be no allocation of additional TAC
- (c)** Reduction in TAC, and therefore a reduction in the number of trips, may be made in the event of poor growth in the size of cockles or significant reduction in catch rates.
- (d)** 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.
- (e)** That the fishery will commence at 1800 hrs on **17 August 2025**.

**(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:

Dates	Number of weeks	Number of landings per week
17 August – 5 September	3 weeks	3 landings per week – no more than 1 per week from Area 7,8,9
7 September – 26 September	3 weeks	4 landings per week– no more than 2 per week from Area 7,8,9
28 September – 31 October	5 weeks	3 landings per week– no more than 1 per week from Area 7,8,9

**(f)** The maximum quantity of cockles that may be landed or carried on board will remain at 13.6m<sup>3</sup>/500 baskets per fishing trip (approx. equivalent 11 tonnes).

**(g)** All harvesting zones of the fishery will be open.

**(h)** 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 trials later this year.

## 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 5,940 tonnes.

## 2. 2025 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 5,940 tonnes and that information related to the stocks will be continually reviewed throughout the season to ensure future sustainability.

**(b)** There will be no allocation of additional TAC.

**(c)** 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 **17 August 2025**

**(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. This will maximise production when meat yields and quality are at their best.

Dates	Number of weeks	Number of landings per week
17 August – 5 September	3 weeks	3 landings per week – no more than 1 per week from Area 7,8,9
7 September – 26 September	3 weeks	4 landings per week– no more than 2 per week from Area 7,8,9
28 September – 31 October	5 weeks	3 landings per week– no more than 1 per week from Area 7,8,9

**(f)** The maximum quantity of cockles that may be landed or carried on board will remain at 13.6m<sup>3</sup>/500 baskets per fishing trip (approx. equivalent 11 tonnes).

**(g)** All areas of the fishery will remain open.

**(h)** 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.)

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

### **3. Manila clam trial**

Under the new Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery Order (No. 2) KEIFCA has the power to create reserves within the area of the new 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.*

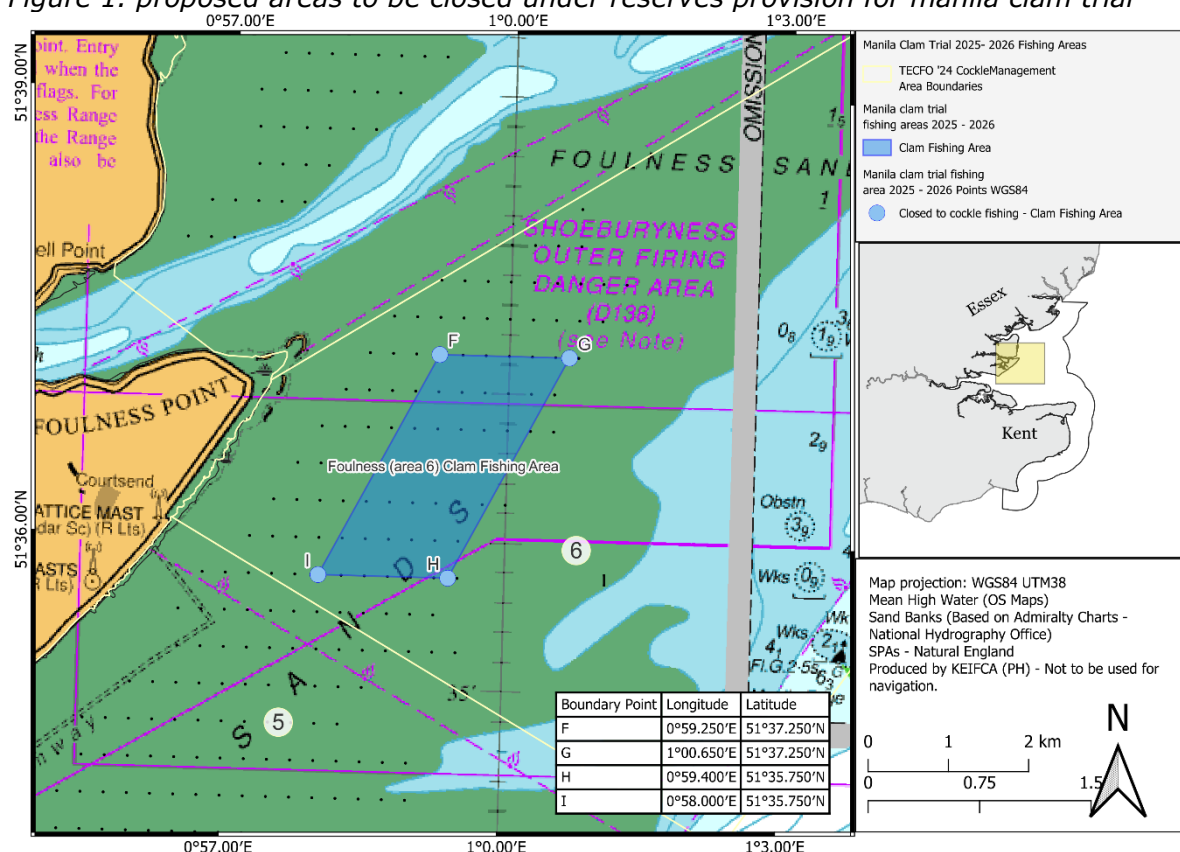
*(2) The Authority may use such reserves for their designated purposes and prohibit their use for any other purpose connected with or ancillary to the dredging, fishing for or taking of cockles*

The 2-year clam trial outlined in Agenda Item B7 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 trials later this year.

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



#### 4. 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 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 previous appropriate assessment for 2022 - 2024 was submitted to Natural England for advice prior to the 2022 fishery and received a positive response.

Officers are continuing to work with Natural England to develop a 7-year HRA for the fishery. The only substantive change to the management of the fishery under TECFO 2024 compared to the previous order is that 15 vessels will now be operating in the fishery. Work is ongoing and discussions are extremely

positive, however the HRA will need to be approved prior to fishing activities commencing.

**Appendix A**

Figure 2. Revised cockle management areas for Thames Estuary

