



Agenda item B6

By: Assistant Chief Fishery Officer

To: Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority – 22 November 2022

Subject: River Roach Oyster Fishery Order 2013

Classification Unrestricted

**Summary:**

To discuss the expiry of the current Order on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2023 and whether the Order be renewed

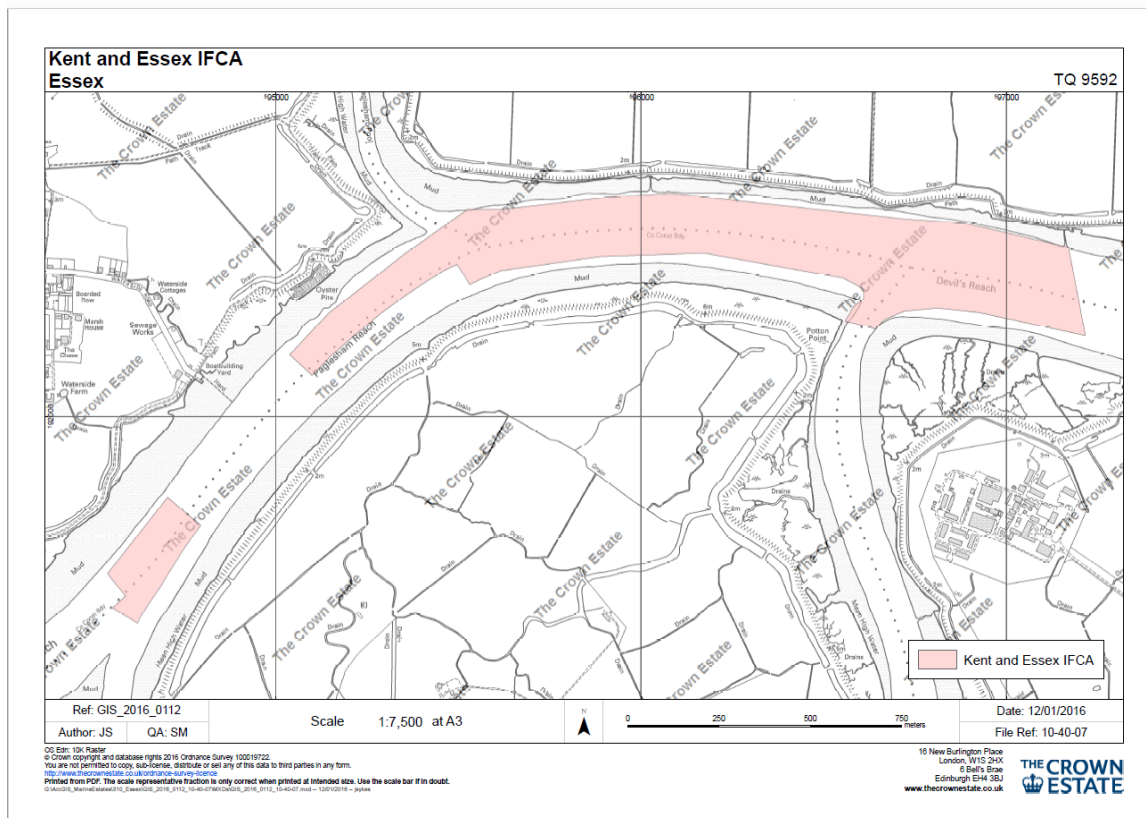
**Recommendation:**

Members are asked to **AGREE** to not renew the River Roach 2013 Several Order.

**Background**

The fishery rights to native oysters in the River Roach were granted in 1923, for a period of 60 years, to the Roach River Oyster Fishery Co. Ltd. Following the decision of that Company to no longer work the fishery after the big freeze of 1962/63 the Roach River Fishery Order 1965 was made which assigned the rights to the Kent and Essex Sea Fisheries Committee. At the time the "Fisheries Department considered it desirable that the fishery should continue" and therefore KESFC took on the new Order with the intention of subletting to local fishermen. From 1965 the beds were leased to various fishermen who had varying success, but the fishery never recovered to anywhere near its former production levels.

The River Roach Oyster Fishery Order 1992 was granted for 20 years and covered a smaller area than the 1965 Order to continue this work, and in 2013 a replacement Order was applied for by KEIFCA to act as an interim measure whilst future management for native oysters was considered and developed. Over the duration of the Order, the Blackwater, Crouch and Roach Estuaries Marine Conservation Zone Native Oyster Permit Byelaw has been made by the Authority and is in force.



## The River Roach Oyster Fishery Order 2013

The intent of the 2013 Order was to consider the increasing problems relating to access to fin fish quotas and the message from industry was that there was increasing interest in shellfish cultivation. There had been a considerable increase in harvesting of clams in the Crouch and Roach in the years up to 2013 and juvenile mussels had also been laid in large quantities within the Crouch. Harvesting of wild gigas oysters was considered to be of significant commercial importance within much of the district and discussion had been underway for a couple of years looking at the recovery of native oysters, which was the precursor to the establishment of the Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne Estuaries Marine Conservation Zone.

The 2013 Order is granted for both Native and Gigas oysters. The fishery was historically mainly for native oysters but in recent years more gigas than natives have been produced. Native oysters have been laid on some plots and it was intended to increase the population of native oysters on the grounds during the 10 year term of the new Order as stocks of native oysters remained quite low both around the area of the Order and in the wider MCZ. It was intended that future work would aim to increase populations.

The 2013 Order is due to expire in August 2023. If the Order expires, the area it covers will then fall within the BCRC MCZ Native Oyster Permit Byelaw which currently does not permit any dredging for native oysters on public grounds but will do so once number of oysters are above specified trigger points.

### **Production from the fishery**

Historically the Roach Oyster Fishery was very productive. Since the freeze of 1962/63 production within the Roach Order area has been modest and variable, but has been declining over time. Over the duration of the 2013 Order the number of fishermen involved in the fishery, leasing plots from KEIFCA has reduced to 2, from a high of 10 fishermen in the years of the 1992 Order. In the five years between 2008 and 2012, 12.5 tonnes of native oysters, 39 tonnes of pacific oysters and 2 tonnes of clams were produced which totalled in excess of £70,000. However, between 2013 and 2019 the total quantity harvested from the Order was less than 2 tonnes, despite far more oysters being laid there as seed to grow on, and no shellfish have been reported as being harvested from the Order since 2019.

### **Moving forwards**

As a result of the declining interest in the fishery and the overarching management of oysters now provided for in the MCZ native oyster byelaw, it is suggested that the Authority does not reapply for the several order to be renewed.

However, this does not preclude KEIFCA or any other stakeholder from applying for a new order in the future. If any individual fishermen or associations were minded to consider applying for an Order, officers would be able to assist them in making the necessary contacts and in their application.

#### **Recommendation:**

Members are asked to **AGREE** to not renew the River Roach 2013 Several Order.