

From: Chief IFCO

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

Subject: The licence application process for the new Thames Estuary
Cockle Fishery Order (T24)

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Summary: This paper updates members on the progress of the new regulating order and maps out the Licence Allocation Process and the formation of an Application Panel as per the T24 management plan.

Recommendations:

The Authority is asked to **APPOINT** five Authority Members and **RECOMMEND** two independent members to sit on the Application Panel.

The Authority **APPROVES** the Licence Allocation Process meeting dates as outlined in this paper, pending the confirmation of the new regulating order.

Introduction

After submitting our application for a new Thames cockle regulating order in April 2023 and running a statutory consultation from the 29 February until the 29 March, DEFRA have indicated that they intend to lay the order towards the end of June 2024. Throughout the whole process of developing new cockle management a core objective has been to work constructively with the industry and make clear decisions as early as possible. Our intention was to run the written application process in April and May before the start of this year's cockle fishery and then to conclude the process of issuing new licences in November 2024. This would give all licence holders, especially any new licence holders six months to sort out any business or vessel arrangements before the fishery starts.

Running the licence application process

The delays in making the regulating order have eaten into this application time, however our intention is to run the application process from the 22 July until the

23 August, which would give all applicants five weeks to put in their applications. Applicants can already start the process of pulling together their applications as the questions (Annex 5, pg.26) as well as the marking scheme (Annex 4, pg.19) can be found in the management plan that was included as part of the statutory consultation.

The Applications Panel

Both the Licence Allocation Procedure (LAP) and the process of scoring licence applications are clearly laid out in detail in the management plan that accompanies the new regulating order. A vital part of this process is the creation of an Applications Panel that will score and rank the applications. The nature and structure of the panel was discussed as part of Consultation 3 and amendments were made based on feedback from the industry. The management plan outlines an application panel that consists of five KEIFCA members and two independent experts. KEIFCA officers have drawn up a short list of five possible people who could sit as independent members for the Authority to consider and we have recommended two as per the management plan. Both the current Chairman and Vice-chairman have already put their names forward to sit on the group however it is up to the Authority to agree five members to sit on the panel.

List of possible independent panellists			
Tim Smith	Association of IFCA's	Has led the Cockle Fisheries Management Plan project	Recommended
Chris Evans	Fish Health Inspector	Significant experience working with the shellfish industry across a range of sectors	Recommended
Craig Merchant	Kent County Council	Significant experience in running and scoring tenders	
Rob Blyth-Skyrme	Marine consultant	Experienced marine consultant who has extensive experience with cockle sector. Has worked on MSC accreditation.	
Joanna Messini	DEFRA	Defra led officer on cockles	

Running the Licence Application Process

Once the application window has closed, officers will undertake the necessary checks and processes, before passing on a specific section or sections of the application form for a panel member to evaluate and score against a grade descriptor.

There are six different sections of the application form

- Fishing experience track record
- Seven Year Business Plan
- Landing and cooking cockles caught in the district
- Support of skilled local employment
- Reduce the impact of fishing operations on both cockle stocks and the seabed
- Plan to reduce CO2 emissions and improve the wider environment

Different members will score different sections with each member scoring at least two sections, but no panel member scoring all the questions. From this process, a score will be calculated and used to make a draft ranked list of the applications.

At the end of September, the application panel will meet to moderate and rank the applications, following the process laid out in the management plan. If the final scores are similar or identical for two or more applications and at the cut-off point where applicants would or would not receive a licence, the relevant applicants would be invited to the meeting of the Applications Panel and asked to orally run through their application and answer questions on their application from the Panel. The Applications Panel could also invite applicants to the oral evidence meeting to clarify key points in their application. Any applicants invited to the oral evidence session would be sent a letter outlining the purpose of the session and the nature of the questions that could be asked.

At the oral evidence session, the applicants would be asked questions that would initially follow the structure of the application form before answering follow-up questions from the Applications Panel. After all the applicants have given evidence, the Applications Panel, would then review each question in turn and come to a decision as to whether the score allocated in the previous meeting should go up, go down or stay the same. The new question scores would then be added to reach a total. Total scores will be used to rank applications and licences would be awarded in descending scores order starting with those with the highest scores until all available licences have been issued.

Applicants will then be informed if they have been successful or not. There is then a short pre-approval stage where supporting documents that were described in an application would be required to be produced, before at the November 2024 quarterly meeting, the Authority would confirm the ranked applicant list and then award licences.

Proposed timeline for the Licence Allocation Procedure

Date	Activity
22 July – 23 August	Application window to apply for licence
14 October	Panel meeting to review scores and rank applications. Applicants close to cut-off point invited to oral evidence meeting.
4 November	Oral evidence meeting
26 November	Application Panels ranking of the applications brought to the full Authority. The Authority agree the final ranking order and the new licence holders.
29 November	New T24 licences for 2025-2021 are awarded
Mid-June 2025	Start of T24 cockle fishery

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