

By: KEIFCA Chief Fishery Officer

To: Kent & Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority
– 26 November 2021

Subject: Listening Phase consultation summary

Classification Unrestricted

Summary: This paper outlines the engagement undertaken in the Listening Phase and provides details of the main headlines taken from these by officers. NB it is recommended that Members review the questionnaires held on the website together with the films made of individual stakeholders at the oral evidence hearings when considering this paper

Recommendation: Members are asked to:

1. **APPROVE** and **COMMENT** on the actions taken by officers in the Listening Phase summary
2. **REVIEW** and **COMMENT** on the questionnaires returned to the Authority as well as the films produced from the oral evidence hearings

Background

Using the feedback from members at the September Authority meeting, officers made amendments to the Listening Phase questionnaire and developed a specific communication plan for the whole process of reviewing the current cockle fisheries and developing of future management (Appendix 1). A range of options were explored to create a separate non-technical questionnaire, however, the new document ended up being nearly as long as the original technical questionnaire as it needed to give adequate background context and information as to how the current cockle fisheries worked. There was also a strong argument that having one document with all the information in, would keep everything simple for stakeholders and KEIFCA staff, whilst avoiding different fishers or stakeholders filling in the wrong questionnaire.

The Listening Phase consultation started on the 27 September with just over 200 emails being sent out to stakeholders and the questionnaire going live on the

KEIFCA website. KEIFCA officers worked with Thames Estuary Partnership to promote the consultation to the wider stakeholder community.

KEIFCA officers then started engaging with fishers around the coast and posters were put up and business cards handed out with key details of how and when to engage in the process. KEIFCA staff also finalised the arrangement for the oral evidence hearing at Thurrock Hotel on the 20 and 21 October and started taking bookings and arranging logistics for the event. Every 7 to 10 days senior officers and admin staff reviewed the engagement response from the different sectors identified in the communication plan and based on this additional effort was made to re-engage with some sectors specifically, including re-sending emails or phoning up key individuals that could pass on information to others. The Listening Phase finished on the 8 November.

Reflections on engagement during the Listening Phase

Setting up and running the Listening Phase took a lot of effort and resource from Senior officers, admin staff, officers and the IFCA Members that gave up their time to support the oral evidence hearing. We would also like to thank Band Agency for putting in extra time and effort into the project and making the filming and website functionality work so well. In general, the engagement process seems to have gone well and we have had feedback from across the spectrum of the cockle industry as well as engagement with local finfish and shellfish operators.

Feedback from KEIFCA Members on the oral evidence panel

Overall, the oral evidence session went well and provided a good opportunity for fishermen and stakeholders to talk directly to Authority Members and express their views. The session helped add a different type of evidence into the decision-making process and helped capture personal experience and examples which would have most likely become lost in the written evidence. After each day of evidence, we held a quick de-brief session with Members and staff involved in running and filming the sessions. Again, the feedback was positive, with Members feeling the process was very informative and helped them get an understanding of some of the key issues. We would like to thank the Members that took part for giving up their time.

Statistics from the Listening Phase

Stakeholder groups were identified and categorised as fishing industry and community stakeholders, with further sub-groups set within each heading (Appendix 2). A total of 202 emails, 224 e-bulletins and 53 paper copies of the questionnaire were sent, in addition to 70 business cards which were distributed across the district by Fishery Officers. Of the 35 bookings for the oral evidence sessions held on 20-21 October 25 people attended and a total of 50 questionnaire responses were received. A full record of the engagement statistics can be found at Appendix 2.

Main headlines from the Listening phase

The headlines below reflect notes made by officers throughout the Listening Phase and officers would strongly suggest that Members refer to individual pieces of evidence to form their own conclusions from the evidence submitted. A key component of the listening phase, and the whole process of reviewing and developing management is creating a system where stakeholders can express their views directly to the KEIFCA members who will make the final decisions. Anonymised written evidence from all the stakeholders either in the form of the questionnaire or as letters can be found and viewed on our website. A specific webpage has also been created to view individually filmed oral evidence: <https://www.kentandessex-ifca.gov.uk/im-interested-in/cockle-fishery-review>

Specific detailed oral and written evidence, covering specific topics like the areas of management, types of gear, access arrangements and type of legislation, submitted during the Listening Phase will be used throughout the different consultation steps as outlined in agenda paper B9.

- In general, there was positive feedback from most stakeholders on how the current TECFO fishery is managed and run on a day-to-day basis. Some individual comments were made concerning how annual surveys are currently undertaken, fishers having a clearer understanding of MPA assessments and the role of Natural England, and one response felt enforcement approach of KEIFCA was too heavy handed.
- Feedback on the current Cockle Fishery Flexible Permit Fishery was generally a lot less positive than for the TECFO fishery, with most fishers feeling that it did not work very well in its current state. There were a range of suggestions on how the fishery could be changed in a future management system.
- Feedback from both the oral evidence and written questionnaires from most of the people currently involved in the TECFO fishery (across the spectrum of roles from crew to company directors) was that the fishery worked very well under the current management set up. Examples were given of the level of investment and jobs the current TECFO supported both at sea and onshore (both cooking and processing cockles and maintaining boats and equipment). Several industry members highlighted the importance of long-term stable access arrangements to the fishery in helping business invest in skilled staff, well maintained fishing vessels and in some cases new local processing plants. A number of fishers made the point that a lot of the current success of the TECFO fishery was down to the investment made by TECFO licence holders, and not just those currently working, but in some cases investment over several generations of a family. The importance of the cockle fishery to the local coastal community with regards to tourism was also highlighted as well as the importance of achieving Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) accreditation for the fishery.

- Fishers not currently holding one of the 14 licences currently issued to work in the TECFO or working for a company that does, had a very different opinion of the current TECFO management, and felt that the current system was a monopoly that they were excluded access to, and making a living from. There were a number of strongly expressed voices that made the point that re-issuing TECFO licences for another 30 years would exclude a whole generation of fishermen from this fishery and that looking at the age of the current licence holders it was unlikely that many of them would still be actively fishing in 30 years' time.
- There was a significant interest from local Thames fishers currently not involved in the cockle industry to create a new small scale cockle fishery set up in a different way to current suction dredge fishery where fishers could use their current under 10m boats and land much smaller amounts of cockles per trip (1½ to ½ tonnes per trip). Some fishers felt there were new opportunities to sell these cockles on their fish stalls or into specific local markets.
- Effort was made throughout the listening phase to not only engage with fishermen based in the district but fishermen from the Wash that have actively fished for cockles in areas outside the TECFO since the 1990s. From the fishers that engaged in the Listening Phase, some of the general feedback echoed many of the points already made, that the TECFO fishery was well run but could be open to more operators and that the permit fishery did not work very well for their current business setup. Ideas were put forward as to how future management could create a larger TECFO area with more licences.

Recommendation: Members are asked to:

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Communication plan for reviewing the current cockle fisheries and developing future management

Introduction

At the September 2021 Authority meeting KEIFCA members agreed the provisional process to review and develop future cockle management. The proposed process is split into a number of time defined steps that will build on each other, with the overall aim of confirming new legislation (in whatever form it might look like) to be in place for when the current TECFO legislation ends in September 2024. With each step we have identified provisional processes and meeting dates, with the aim of setting out a clear process that helps everyone understand when, where and what could be decided at each stage.

Objective 1: To reach out, engage with, and seek views of people and business that have an interest or are in some way impacted by the management of the Thames and KEIFCA cockle fisheries during the listening phase.

Objective 2: To use the engagement from the listening phase to develop a registered list of respondents that will be contacted through-out the legislative framework development phase, the technical detail phase and the Statutory process phase.

Engaging with the community

Throughout the process KEIFCA will hold regular public Authority meetings supported by easily accessible and promoted papers, these meetings provide a route for all stakeholders to engage with the decision-making process. KEIFCA members are an important conduit between the Authority and the local communities around our coast and can use their own networks to help promote engagement and give constructive feedback on the process as it progresses.

The KEIFCA website will also be a vital plank in our communication strategy and helps provide a focal point for information about the process as well as provides a location for key documents to be viewed or downloaded. Another key component will be to use the KEIFCA e-bulletin to help specifically promote engagement in this process. Normally the e-bulletin is used to promote KEIFCA quarterly meetings and is linked to the publication of papers a week prior to each meeting. With over 150 subscribers, the e-bulletin helps create a regular link to stakeholders and encourages involvement by referring recipients to the website. KEIFCA can repurpose the e-bulletin to inform the wide group of stakeholders about the process and how to engage. KEIFCA will also work with Thames Estuary Partnership to engage with the wider stakeholder community.

Listening Phase engagement

The Listening Phase seeks to gather views and ideas from all stakeholder groups to understand what works well within the current fisheries management systems and where people believe changes need to be made. To best capture feedback from stakeholders, a bespoke engagement process has

been developed, with a specific questionnaire and proposed recorded oral evidence sessions. It is hoped that by having specific oral evidence sessions where stakeholders can give evidence directly to Authority Members on specific topics in a standard way, we can include a wider range of people in the evidence gathering process. The aim will be to record this evidence (taking into account GDPR requirements) which would allow people not able to attend the session to hear the views expressed, and potentially to produce an edited film that can be played to the Authority.

Engagement in the management development phases

As the process moves from the review phase into the management development phase, the communication strategy moves for a wider general engagement process into a more focused and detailed process. The main focus of engagement will be to use the contact details of the stakeholders that contributed to the listening phase to create a distribution list for the consultations described in the management development process. Wider engagement through disseminating information on the KEIFCA website, regular e-bulletins and through the Thames Estuary Partnership network will still be a key part of the process and any new stakeholders that engage as the process moves through the different stages will be added to the distribution list.

Key stakeholder groups

Current Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery Order (TECFO) licence holders: As part of issuing licences, KEIFCA is in regular communication with this group and maintains an up-to-date postal address and email list. Members of this group regularly contribute to KEIFCA decision making, by attending IFCA meetings and writing to the Authority regarding annual management measures or other business.

Current Cockle Fishery Flexible Permit Byelaw (CFFPB) permit holders: As part of issuing permits, KEIFCA is in annual communication with this group and maintains an up-to-date postal address and email list drawn from yearly permit applications. Some of the applicants are based in the Thames and some are based in the Wash and will also be included in other stakeholder groupings.

The wider Thames cockle fishing industry: Ports like Leigh-on-Sea, Whitstable and Queenborough make up the hub of the Thames cockle fleet, with skippers, crew and onshore support staff usually based locally. Processing happens locally for some businesses based out of Leigh, whilst other business cook their cockles further afield. KEIFCA officers work regularly with members of cockle industry throughout the cockle season either by issuing management updates via both email and WhatsApp or by carrying out inspections at sea or at the harbour side. Officers will actively promote the listening phase using these normal communication routes as well as by putting up posters in ports, handing out business cards with consultation details and hard copies of the questionnaire document.

Wash cockle industry: Since the 1990's a number of fishing vessels from the Wash and West coast ports have fished on cockle beds outside the TECFO area. KEIFCA has issued permits to these vessels, which means that there is an email contact list for these cockle boats. Apart from this

annual interaction there is little regular communication with this stakeholder group as the ports are based with Eastern IFCA's district. As well as emailing permit holders, fishery officers will contact key individuals in the Wash and look to engage directly with industry members.

Thames's fishermen (not cockles): KEIFCA works regularly with a wide range of fishermen outside the cockle industry and fishery officers regularly visit ports and work closely with these fishermen. Traditionally the most effective way of engaging with this sector is in person, on a one-to-one basis. Officers will actively promote the listening phase consultation using these normal communication routes as well as by putting up posters in ports, handing out business cards with consultation details and hard copies of the questionnaire document.

The wider local community: From Harbour Authorities to local mechanics, and from fishmongers to harbour-side cafes the cockle fishery provides a reliable summer income and tourist destination to harbours like Whitstable and Leigh-on-Sea. Although indirect, the management of the cockle fishery could impact these businesses. Local conservation and community groups like the Kent Wildlife Trust, Essex Wildlife Trust and Leigh port partnership, are also important voices to consider when developing future management. KEIFCA will work with Thames Estuary Partnership to engage with this wider stakeholder group and foster input and ideas from the local community. Posters in ports and the KEIFCA e-bulletin could also help provide a link to these wider interest groups.

Local and national government: KEIFCA has managed the cockle fishery in the Thames for a long time and there are a wide range of local and national government bodies and agencies that KEIFCA works with in connection to the running of the cockle fishery. Organisations like Southend foreshore department, London Port Health, the Marine Management Organisation and DEFRA all feed into the background management running the cockle fisheries. Local (local council and county council) and regional political interests (Coastal MPs) are important voices to include in the conversation when reviewing and developing management, helping to bring in the voices and views of their local constituents. Specific meetings will be held with the organisations that have duties overlapping with the cockle fishery and organisational leads will be regularly updated via email. Coastal MPs and councillors will be updated with a summary email.

Summary of focused engagement with different stakeholder groups

Key target group	Evidence Collection		Physical engagement				Digital engagement			
	Online questionnaire	Oral Evidence hearing	Officers promote in ports	business card with engagement details	Handout printed off questionnaire	1 to 1 chat with Snr Officers	Website	Twitter	e-bulletin	Direct e-mail
Current (TECFO) licence holders	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Current (CFFPB) permit holders	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
The wider Thames Cockle industry	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
The wider Wash Cockle industry	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Thames's fishermen (not cockles)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
The wider local community	✓	✓					✓	✓	✓	
Local and national government	✓						✓	✓	✓	

Measuring success

Throughout the process to review and develop future cockle management, KEIFCA officers will be monitoring key indicators to check that the messages and consultation documents are being picked up by the different stakeholder groups, that specific actions identified in this plan are engaging with their intended stakeholder groups. With so many different needs and wants, it is important to acknowledge that it is unlikely that everyone will get what they want from any future cockle fishery management system. However, it is important to create a review and management development process that stakeholders recognise as transparent and evidence-based, where stakeholders can contribute their experience and views to decision makers, and where the advantages and disadvantages of different options on individuals and stakeholder groups are clearly understood when decisions are made.

Listening Phase engagement: Officers will be monitoring engagement in three main ways during the listening phase; by recording engagement and any feedback it generated, recording engagement outputs and capturing feedback on the process.

Recording engagement and any feedback it generated	Recording engagement outputs	Feedback
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of emails and e-bulletins sent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of questionnaires filled in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From members at Authority meeting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of questionnaires sent out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of bookings for the oral evidence hearings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informally from stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business cards handed out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of attendees to the oral evidence hearings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-to one engagement from officers on shore patrol or in the office 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of letters/ emails received 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phone or email enquiries 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website hits and questionnaire downloads 		

All the metrics will be recorded, where possible for each stakeholder group and there will be two reviews within the consultation process (17th October and 1st November) where officers will review metrics and look to specifically reengage with an individual stakeholder group if engagement is low. The overall metrics will be included in the summary report at the November meeting.

Management development phase engagement: Monitoring engagement during the management development phase will follow the same basic format but is focused less on general engagement and more on supporting stakeholders that have engaged in the process understand and contribute effectively to the development and evaluation of management options. As with the Listening Phase all the metrics will be recorded, where possible for each stakeholder group and the overall metrics will be included in the summary report at the following Authority meeting. Based on feedback from Authority meetings the communication plan will be updated, or specific new actions will be taken.

Appendix 2 – Record of engagement

Type of engagement	STAKEHOLDER GROUPS								Total number
	FISHING INDUSTRY STAKEHOLDERS						COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS		
	KEIFCA DISTRICT FISHING INDUSTRY				OUTSIDE KEIFCA DISTRICT FISHING INDUSTRY		The wider local community	Local and national government	
	TECFO float	Non-TECFO-specified CFFPB permit holders	Other cacklo fishing industry stakeholders	Non-cacklo fishing industry stakeholders	CFFPB permit holders	Other cacklo industry stakeholders			
RECORD OF ENGAGEMENT									
Emails sent	53	15	1	81	16	3	10	23	202
E-bulletins sent	7	0	2	14	2	0	148	50	223
Questionnaires sent out	10	2		39			1	1	53
Business cards handed out	10	2		17			31	10	70
1-1 engagement	3	1		19			2		25
Phone or email enquiries	4	2		14			1		21
RECORD OF ENGAGEMENT RESPONSES/RESULTS									
Questionnaires filled in	19	6	3	12	6	3	1		50
Attendees to oral evidence	16	1	1	5	2	0	0	0	25
Letters/ emails received	1			5			4		10