

From: Chief IFCO

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

Subject: Small scale manila clam trial outline

Classification: **Unrestricted**

**Summary:**

Nearly forty fishers have expressed an interest in taking part in a Manila clam trial, however there are only four to five spaces available. The paper outlines a potential application process for fishers and more detail as to how the trial will be run.

**Recommendations:**

The Authority is asked to **DISCUS** and **APPROVE** the application process (including the application form) for the Manila clam trial.

The Authority is asked to **APPOINT** three Authority members to sit on a panel to evaluate the Manila clam trial applications.

The Authority is asked to **DISCUS** and **APPROVE** officers undertaking a specific Manila clam survey in the Thames.

**Introduction**

As outlined at the March Authority meeting Manila clams have become ever more abundant in the Thames and have the potential to become a future fishery. As also outlined at the last meeting it is important to understand the impact and economic potential of different types of manila clam harvesting gear and operations before any legislation is developed. Using a scientific and fisheries management exemption under the cockle fishery flexible permit byelaw, we are proposing setting aside an area for manila clam harvesting on an experimental or trial basis. As agreed at the last meeting, in anticipation of this, we engaged with the local industry and asked for expressions of interest from fishers who would like to take part in the trial. Nearly forty fishers emailed us back and expressed an interest in taking part in the trial. Whilst it is brilliant to have so many volunteers, we do only have four to five spaces on the trial.

## **Creating an application process**

As well as expressing an interest, we also had feedback from some fishers suggesting that they already had fishing gear that they thought would be suitable and would happily set it up and use it in the trial. To get the most out of the trial it makes sense to test a range of different types of gear so we can see what works (i.e. one or two suction dredges and the rest other dredge designs). So that we can be fair and give equal opportunity to all those fishers that expressed an interest in the trial, we are suggesting running an application process.

Fishers wishing to take part in the trial would be asked to send us a photo of the boat and gear they intend to use (or drawings of the gear if it has not been made) and how they intend to set it up, how they intend to sort both clams and cockles and what markets they intend to sell their catch into or how are they going to process the clams. Finally, we were then intending to ask prospective trialists to provide an outline of how they plan to test and develop their gear to meet the technical requirements.

As described in the March paper all applicants would need to have an ivms tracking system on their vessel (reporting every 3 minutes) as well as all the necessary MCA paperwork. We would ask that any fishers or fishing associations that are looking to apply for grant funding for the trial contact KEIFCA as soon as possible so we can look to see how we could accommodate this in our application process.

## **Manila clam surveys**

A number of fishers that expressed an interest also suggested additional areas where they have seen significant quantities of clams. If the Authority agrees, officers will write to all the fishers that expressed an interest and ask them to pass on coordinates, then based on this feedback we will task one of our catamarans to survey the ground and add this information to our stock assessments. After discussing clam survey techniques with officers from Southern IFCA, it makes sense to build on the information we have already got from our annual cockle surveys and undertake a specific clam survey to help us get a more accurate idea of the biomass and age structure of some of the beds. If we do find significant new clam beds outside marine protected areas, we will discuss this with Natural England and see if we can increase the number of spaces on the trial.

## **Running the application process**

As we have more spaces than applicants, we will form a panel of three KEIFCA Members, and if possible, we will look to second Southern IFCA members with technical knowledge of clam fishing, to score applications under the headings outlined above (most likely this would happen online). If any fisher that has applied wants to appeal the decision, they will need to inform us within seven days of the decision. The Authority will then hold a specific meeting of the panel and hear firsthand the appeal from the fisher. Panel members will be able to ask questions and then will consider whether the application should be rescored based on additional information or clarification of their written application (again this process can happen online to help make this process as easily as possible for the applicant). After this process is complete, we will confirm the final list of applicants and start working with them to get ready for the trial.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Activity</b>
27 May – 21 June	Application window to apply for trial
4 July or 5 July	Panel meeting to review and score applications
22 July or 23 July	Appeals meeting and confirmation of trialists

After discussing the trial with our legal team we need to make it very clear to all prospective applicants that taking part in the trial does not create or confer any legitimate expectation of future access to any possible clam fishery or to any future trials. If these trials are successful and more trials are undertaken in the future it would be the intention of the Authority to run a new application process using criteria deemed relevant by the Authority, that would be open to all those that expressed an interest.

### **Running the trial**

Those fishers that take part in the trial will be allowed to sell their catch however they will be expected to provide information to help answer the nine areas we need to investigate. The information provided will be included in public reports and we intend to present a summary of the findings at our January meeting. Understanding the potential markets for Thames Manila clams is a key component of this trial, and we will require applicants to pass on relevant information and help us with this part of the project.

*The trial would need to collect a wide range of information and data:*

1. Impact of manila clam fishing gear on the seabed
2. Assess whether fishing activity would pass an HRA
3. Damage rate on clams harvested (damage rate on any other shellfish harvested)
4. Speed of fishing/ efficiency rate of gear (on a range of ground types/ areas)
5. Efficiency in separating undersized clams, clams from cockles, and undersized cockles.
6. Quality of clams harvested
7. Profitability of fishing
8. Opportunities for local economy
9. Assess compliance/ enforcement of the fishery

The list above shows the initial area identified for the trial (new areas might be added if additional stocks are found). Our intention would be to start the trial from the 2 October until the 8 November. Our current expectation would be that there would be two or three trips to try out and set up the gear and then five to seven trips spread out over the remaining weeks of the trial. Officers would work closely with the trialists either joining them for full fishing trips or meeting them on the grounds to conduct specific trials. Our intention is to bring back a more detailed plan for the September meeting once we have completed the surveys and have a clearer idea of the amount of available stock that is over the 35mm minimum size. For the fishers that expressed an interest in the trial but did not take part, we will endeavour to keep them up to date with the progress of the trial.

**Recommendations:**

The Authority is asked to **DISCUS** and **APPROVE** the application process (including the application form) for the Manila clam trial.

The Authority is asked to **APPOINT** three Authority members to sit on a panel to evaluate the Manila clam trial applications.

The Authority is asked to **DISCUS** and **APPROVE** officers undertaking a specific Manila clam survey in the Thames.

## Appendix 1 - Draft outline of the Manila clam application form

All applicants will need to meet the basic criteria for their application to be considered.

<b>Basic criteria</b>	
MCA certificate, including any necessary stability requirements.	
Transcript of the registry	
A working ivms or VMS system, able to record the vessels position at least every 5 minutes.	Will need working system as part of HRA requirements. Trialists will not be able to take part in the trial until we can confirm to NE that this is working
<b>Gear trial details</b>	
A photo of the vessel you intend to use in the trial	
A photo(s) of the fishing gear you intend to use in the trial or drawings describing the gear you intend to build. Please outline the key features that you think will help make the gear fish well.	
A photo(s) of the fishing gear you intend to use to sort or riddle clams and cockles in the trial or drawings describing the gear you intend to build. Please outline the key features that you think will help to efficiently sort clams from cockles and remove undersized clams.	
Please can you outline how to intend to sell or market your catch, especially any ways you are thinking of adding value to your catch.	
Please can you outline your plan to trial and use your fishing gear over the duration of the trial?	
Any additional information you think is relevant for the panel to consider.	

Scoring Scheme	
<b>0</b>	No response is provided, or the response is not relevant to the question
<b>1</b>	The response significantly fails to meet the standards required, contains significant short comings and/or is inconsistent with other parts of the application.
<b>2</b>	The response falls short of achieving the expected standard in a number of identifiable respects.
<b>3</b>	The response meets the requirement in certain material respects and provides certain information, which is relevant, but which is lacking or inconsistent in material respects.
<b>4</b>	The response meets the requirement in most material respects but is lacking or inconsistent in some minor respects.
<b>5</b>	The response meets the requirement in al material respects and is extremely likely to deliver the required output/ outcome.

