

Agenda Item – C3

Report on the patrol vessels 'Tamesis' and 'FPV Vigilant' Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority Report for the period May – November 2022

Vessel priorities:

- Monitor TECFO areas for compliance with regulations
- Collect damage rate samples from TECFO fleet
- Conduct stock assessment surveys on cockle beds
- Conduct oyster stock survey in BCRC MCZ
- Conduct native oyster stock survey in Medway in association with ZSL
- Monitor areas closed under Cockle Permit Byelaw
- Conduct joint operations with MMO
- Conduct joint patrols with Essex Police Marine Unit
- Patrol district boundary for incursions by oversize or foreign vessels
- Patrol areas closed for bottom trawling under Essex Estuaries byelaw
- Record data of all vessel sightings
- Record data of all static fishing gears (fixed nets and pots)
- Input key enforcement information into national fisheries enforcement database (MCSS)
- Inspect pots and traps for compliance with KEIFCA byelaws
- Inspect recreational angling vessels to ensure compliance with regulations
- Vessel Maintenance

Fisheries Enforcement

As is traditionally the case, the summer months proved to be a busy period for the patrol vessels. FPV Vigilant is utilised annually to disrupt potential drift netting activity during the spring bass run, and this year was no different. In addition, Vigilant provided marine support to MMO Officers involved in Operation Whitaker looking at transshipment and bass landings by unlicensed vessels. Vigilant also conducted a number of joint patrols with Essex Police Marine Unit where officers were briefed potential fisheries offences and on the type of offences most commonly encountered by KEIFCA officers.

When the Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery opened in June, the priority taskings for Vigilant were to monitor compliance during the start time on Sunday evenings and to collect damage rate samples from the fleet. Additional tasking through the period concerned locating reported unmarked whelk gear in the Barrow Deep, and oyster and clam fishing in the Crouch and Roach. Vigilant was also engaged in joint patrols

with Eastern IFCA officers in the Stour and Orwell. Vigilant was also utilised on the Medway and Thames for monitoring and intelligence gathering patrols. Tamesis was also engaged on enforcement duties during this period as she was tasked to haul and seize the illegal whelk pots which logged by Vigilant. As usual Tamesis also put to sea to monitor activity on the 6-mile limit, and to ensure no incursions by oversize or foreign vessels.

Between May and November, officers logged 79 fishing vessels, of which 9 were charter recreational vessels. Non-boarding inspections were conducted on 10 commercial vessels, and 1 charter recreational angling vessels, the latter to ensure all aboard were aware of, and compliant with landing restrictions and minimum sizes. Following the relaxation of Covid regulations, full boarding inspections were conducted on 25 commercial fishing vessels, all of which were found to be compliant with regulations.

During this period static fishing gear was recorded on 43 occasions with surface markers being inspected on 29 of these, which in 16 instances warranted a full gear inspection. Offence notices were left on 13 surface markers which were not clearly marked and 3 strings totalling 108 non-compliant whelk pots were seized.

Conservation/Survey Work

Surveys

As is the norm in the early part of this period Tamesis was engaged in the annual stock assessment of Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery beds. After a number of failed attempts due to Covid restrictions over the past two years, September saw the resumption of the Blackwater Crouch Roach and Colne MCZ oyster surveys. An additional survey this year saw the vessel relocate to Queenborough harbour for four days to conduct a native oyster survey in the Medway in association with the Zoological Society of London.

Marine Mammal observations

Marine mammals were logged on 16 occasions with individual seal sightings in the Blackwater and in the Crouch and Roach, as well as further offshore. The usual large group of seals comprising a mix of adults and juveniles was also observed at low tide on the Buxey and Ray sands. Porpoises were observed and logged on 3 occasions, those being on the Colne Bar, the Blackwater, and the Wallet Spitway.

Maintenance

Routine maintenance was conducted on the vessels as required and monthly safety checks were carried out on schedule. No unanticipated problems or defects were uncovered during this period.

Other Information

Statistics

During this period FPV Vigilant put to sea 32 times using 2,407 litres of fuel to cover a patrol distance of 1,489 miles. Tamesis has been at sea on 20 occasions covering 629 miles and took 3,047 litres of fuel.

Invitation to Authority Members and P.R

An open invitation is extended to Authority Members to join the crew on an enforcement patrol or survey aboard the vessel

Colm O'Laoi

Skipper FPV Tamesis & Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Officer