

Agenda Item - C3
Report on the patrol vessels 'Tamesis' and 'FPV Vigilant'
Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority
Report for the period January – June 2025

Vessel priorities:

- Conduct spring cockle stock survey for T24
- Conduct spring cockle stock survey for Permit Fishery
- Vessel support for MMO Bass operation
- Operation Labrax – KEIFCA Bass operation
- Operation EMSTARA – National Aquapol operation
- 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
- Monitor areas closed under Cockle Permit Byelaw
- Patrol areas closed for bottom trawling under Essex Estuaries byelaw
- Vessel Maintenance

Overview

The beginning of the year can be a mixed period for the vessels as weather often has a significant impact on the patrol plans, and as we get into February and March deck equipment needs to be serviced and certified prior to vessel coding surveys. This was indeed the case this year with an additional level of complexity as Vigilant was due a 5 year renewal survey, which meant that it would come under Workboat Code 3 from the end of March.

As we got to April and May however, the normal pattern of operation resumed with Tamesis being used for the spring cockle surveys and Vigilant for the now annual bass enforcement operations. An additional tasking this year was to participate in what was a highly successful national maritime security operation, organised by the Joint Maritime Security Council (JMSC) which involved working alongside the Marine Police Units, MMO, Border Force, Navy, and Coastguard.

Fisheries Enforcement

The early part of the period was dominated primarily by two factors, bad weather, and a lack of fishing activity due to very poor catches. The potting vessels only start working in March when they turn over gear which has been stored at sea for

the winter, and with a bass closure in effect for February and March the netting vessels are also less active. However, both Tamesis and Vigilant did conduct a few patrols before the focus shifted to maintenance and coding surveys. Once the surveys were completed and the certification received, normal service resumed with Vigilant being tasked as the primary enforcement vessel. In addition to routine patrols, this included two specific operations aimed at both commercial and recreational vessels targeting bass.

During the course of these patrols officers logged 46 vessels, of which 33 were commercial fishing vessels. Officers conducted 4 full boarding inspections on 4 vessels and non-boarding inspections were conducted on a further 8 of these vessels, resulting in intelligence reports being submitted on a number of issues. Charter recreational vessels were logged on 5 of occasions and recreational vessels made up a further 8 vessels and 3 non-boarding inspections.

The patrol vessels also recorded gear sightings on 29 occasions, which comprised mostly of fixed nets, lobster pots, with a closer inspection of the gear or markers on 10 occasions. Most offences concerned gear which was incorrectly marked or not clearly marked and offence notices were left on these. Where gear was not marked at all, the gear itself was seized, and to date no-one has claimed ownership. In the next period Tamesis will be used to follow up on the incorrectly marked gear, and if it has not been rectified the gear will be seized.

Worthy of note in relation to gear was that over a few weeks in early April unattached surface markers (dahn flags and cans) were found on numerous occasions drifting freely in the sea. This coincides with a report from a local fisherman who stated that the dahn flags had been cut off gear he had set off the coast of Essex.

Conservation/Survey Work

Surveys

The spring cockle survey commenced in April as usual, with priority being given to the TECFO 2024 areas. Tamesis conducted the surveys on Marsh End, the Mouse-Knob, the Maplin Spit, the West Barrows, and the East Barrows. Tamesis also surveyed the outer sections of Area 2 & 3 where the presence of deep gullies pose a significant risk to the quad bikes. The focus then shifted to the Permit Fishery grounds (Area 20) the Dengi, Ray, and Buxey sands. Whilst clams have been recorded on this survey for many years, particular attention was given to the clams this year following on from the trial fishery last Autumn.

Marine Mammal observations

Marine mammals were logged on 13 occasions with seal sightings recorded from Southend up to THE Walton backwaters, where significant a significant colony known to exist. Porpoises were recorded on 2 occasions, on the Colne bar and in the Wallet off Clacton.

Maintenance

Routine maintenance was conducted on Tamesis as scheduled, and the vessel passed the annual MECAL survey with only minor defects which were quickly rectified. The vessel is due to be put on the hard in Brightlingsea for cleaning, and have new anodes fitted. A gap analysis is also due to be conducted over the summer months in preparation for the vessel coming under Workboat Code 3 following her 15 year renewal survey next February. It is anticipated that a significant amount of work will be required for the vessel to be compliant with the new code.

Vigilant on the other hand has already been adapted to come under Workboat Code 3, though it did require a considerable period of time and work. The initial defect list included upgrading the bilge pumps and anchors, adding a personal locator beacon for crew, and the development of a Safety Management System document and associated record maintenance system.

Other Information

Statistics

During this period FPV Vigilant put to sea 10 times taking 863 litres of fuel and cover a patrol distance of 457 nautical miles. Tamesis has also been at sea on 15 occasions taking 1658 litres and covering 498 nautical miles.

Colm O'Laoi

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