

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

Vessel priorities:

- Carry out stock survey of TECFO cockle beds
- Carry out pre-fishery stock assessment of Clam Trial area
- Monitor Cockle Permit Fishery fleet for zonal restrictions
- Conduct damage rate checks on cockle permit fishery fleet
- Monitor TECFO areas for compliance with regulations
- Conduct damage rate checks on TECFO vessels
- Monitor bass netting activity
- Operate as support vessel for MMO enforcement
- Locate and inspect pots and traps off Essex coast
- 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)
- Inspect pots and traps for compliance with KEIFCA byelaws
- Inspect recreational angling vessels to ensure compliance with regulations
- Vessel Maintenance

Fisheries Enforcement

During this quarter the Essex vessels were actively involved in a broad range of activities, overseeing compliance, gathering data, conducting stock assessment surveys, and providing operational support for partner agencies.

The early part of this period saw Vigilant carry on with taskings from the previous period, specifically targeting vessels netting for bass. Some of these patrols were conducted in collaboration with officers from the Marine Management Organisation (MMO). Other taskings in the early part of the summer included inspecting gear (mostly pots) being set by both commercial and recreational operators off the coast between Clacton & Harwich.

When the cockle fishery opened emphasis shifted to boarding vessels to conduct damage rate checks, particularly on the Margate Sand which was being intensively worked by the Permit Fishery fleet. During this period the vessel was moved to and operated out of Ramsgate. Tamesis was also utilised during the Permit fishery to monitor spatial closures and ensure cockle vessels were not working in areas allocated to the clam trial fishery.

When TECFO finally opened Vigilant was once again tasked with obtaining damage rate samples, though as a lesser priority with individual vessels being encouraged to undertake their own damage rate assessments.

The autumn bass run saw emphasis switch once again, with the focus at this time being on recreational vessels to ensure compliance with the two fish per day catch limit for bass, and with minimum sizes for all species in the KEIFCA byelaw. Netting vessels were also monitored to ensure that drift nets were not being used to target bass.

During the course of this period officers logged 111 fishing vessels, of which 98 were commercial fishing vessel and, 13 were charter recreational vessels. Boarding inspections were conducted on 30 occasions, leading to 1 offence being investigated, and 1 verbal warning for a non-compliant riddle on a vessel fishing for whelks. Non-boarding inspections were carried out on a further 18 vessels, which were all observed to be compliant. In addition to these, 14 recreational vessels were inspected, 3 of which were boarded and 11 non-boarding inspections. In most cases the vessels were given Minimum Size stickers and information on sizes and catch restrictions. No offences were detected.

During this period static fishing gear was inspected on 40 occasions, with particular emphasis on KEIFCA byelaws regarding marking of pots and traps. As a result 5 parlour pots were seized, 1 notice of offence left, and 1 skipper advised verbally to ensure his gear was clearly marked in accordance with the byelaw.

Conservation/Survey Work

Surveys

There were a number of survey days in this period. Tamesis undertook a cockle survey on the East Barrows to monitor the stock and growth of the cockles, although planned surveys further south were hampered by a period of bad weather. With the clam trial due to commence November, Tamesis also undertook a double density survey of the trial and control area on the Buxey, to obtain baseline data for the TAC, with a proposed post-trial survey to take place in January

Marine Mammal observations

Marine mammal sightings were recorded on 28 distinct occasions, featuring individual seal sightings from across the northern part of the district from Harwich down to Southend and out as far as the Black Deep. Large groups of seals were also observed in Hamford Water, on the Ray and Foulness sands, and in the Roach and Middleway. Porpoises were sighted on 3 occasions at the southern end of the Wallet and in the Blackwater.

Maintenance

Vigilant was hauled out for the 1000 hour service on the engines, and monthly maintenance was carried out as normal.

Monthly maintenance was carried out on Tamesis and the engines had their annual service. The vessel did develop a fault with an oil leak from the turbo on the port engine, however this was quickly removed and sent away for repair. A major forthcoming issue is the vessel will need significant modification to become Workboat 3 compliant. To this end a surveyor attended the vessel to complete a gap analysis which has been approved by MECAL and discussions are now underway to understand how best to address these deficiencies.

Other Information

Statistics

During this period FPV Vigilant put to sea 24 times taking 2257 litres of fuel to cover a patrol distance of 1134 miles. Tamesis has been at sea on 10 occasions covering 303 miles and bunkered 1971 litres during this period.

Colm O'Laoi

Skipper FPV Tamesis & Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Officer