

### **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 – May 2026**

#### **Vessel priorities:**

- Conduct spring cockle stock survey for T24
- Conduct spring cockle stock survey for Permit Fishery
- Conduct pre-fishery Manilla Clam stock survey
- 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
- 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.

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 routine enforcement patrols. An additional request came from Essex Police Dog Unit in March to assist with the search for a missing person. Search dogs were brought on Vigilant to check the barges and shallow areas on the Dengie flats.

A further consideration going forward is that the rise in fuel costs due to the ongoing situation in the Middle east may impact vessel taskings as the year progresses.

#### **Fisheries Enforcement**

Poor weather and poor catch rates were the dominant factors in the early part of this period, resulting in fewer patrols than normal. The trawlers opted not to go to sea due to catch rates not covering fuel costs and the potting vessels only started working in March when they turned over gear which had been stored at sea for the winter. There was limited inshore netting until the bass closure in February and March, and one vessel continued to fish for whelks when the weather conditions

allowed. Both Tamesis and Vigilant were engaged in fishery enforcement patrols though in February the emphasis was on maintenance and annual certification.

During the course of their patrols officers logged thirty five vessels, of which twenty seven were commercial fishing vessels. Officers conducted two full boarding inspections on vessels and non-boarding inspections were conducted on a further five of these vessels, resulting in intelligence reports being submitted on a number of issues. Charter recreational vessels were logged on six occasions and two recreational vessels were logged with one additional non-boarding inspection.

The patrol vessels also recorded gear sightings on eleven occasions, which comprised mostly of fixed nets, lobster pots, with a closer inspection of the gear or markers on three occasions. Only one offence was detected regarding marking of gear, and verbal advice was issued to the owner.

## **Conservation/Survey Work**

### *Surveys*

The first round of survey work in this period was a double density survey of the clam trial area on the Buxey, prior to the opening of the trial fishery.

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) Buxey sands. The Dengie and Ray sands remain to be completed, with persistent easterly winds hampering efforts.

Once the cockle survey has been completed, the focus will shift once again to clams with the post-fishery double density stock survey.

### *Marine Mammal observations*

Marine mammals were logged on thirteen occasions with seal sightings recorded from throughout the Blackwater and Colne, and out to the Barrows and East Swin. Porpoises were only logged on a single occasion, with an adult and juvenile being observed in the Blackwater off Bradwell

## **Maintenance**

With Tamesis approaching her 15<sup>th</sup> birthday it was originally planned that she would transition to Workboat Code edition 3 (WB3) at this time. However, with Nerissa undergoing a major refit in Cowes, it was decided that it would be prudent to defer the transition until the December deadline. This avoided a situation where there was no workboat availability in the district. There was still a requirement for Tamesis to undergo an out of water inspection, so the vessel was hauled out in Fox's Marina, Ipswich for one week in February. After the inspection an extension to the vessel coding was granted until December 2026 by which time the vessel must

transition to WB3. The gap analysis for this was completed in the summer of 2025 and work is ongoing to obtain estimates from boat yards and engineers to carry out the required works.

FPV Vigilant has already been coded under WB3 so the annual survey was a fairly routine exercise. A few minor defects were addressed on the day and a new certificate was issued by the Certifying Authority MECAL.

Routine maintenance was carried out as scheduled, with maintenance tasks and service schedules all being monitored and tasked with the aid of the SeaFlux vessel management software which has now been fully implemented.

## **Other Information**

### *Statistics*

During this period FPV Vigilant put to sea six times taking 407 litres of fuel and covered a patrol distance of 151 nautical miles. Tamesis has also been at sea on eleven occasions taking 1,991 litres and covering 453 nautical miles.

All crew completed person overboard, fire, and abandon ship drills in accordance with schedules.

**Colm O'Laio**

***Principal Vessel Operations Officer (Senior Skipper) Essex***