

### **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 2024**

#### **Vessel priorities:**

- Conduct spring cockle stock survey for TECFO
- Conduct spring cockle stock survey for Permit Fishery
- Record data of all vessel sightings
- Record data of all static fishing gears (fixed nets and pots)
- Recruitment and training of First Mate
- 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. An additional complication in 2024 was the departure of the First Mate and the need to recruit and then train a replacement, a process which is currently ongoing. The cockle surveys in April and May went ahead on schedule with additional sampling and assessment as the survey was expanded to include manilla clams in advance of the proposed trial fishery. Another complication which impacted on capability was a limit on the ability to board vessels following the recent introduction by the MCA of the third edition of the workboat code, which requires two officers to remain on Vigilant at all times, so a minimum of three officers are required for boarding operations.

#### **Fisheries Enforcement**

The beginning of the quarter started with low officer numbers as the new First Mate had yet to take up his post. However, despite the crew limitations Vigilant managed to put to sea and conduct patrols that covered the district from the Kings Channel and the Rough Shoal to Southend and the North Kent coast, and into the rivers Crouch, Roach, Blackwater, and Colne. Once in post the first mate spent his first

few weeks completing powerboat and enforcement training courses, but quickly became an efficient addition to the team.

During the course of these patrols officers logged forty-seven vessels, of which thirty were commercial fishing vessels. Due to the aforementioned difficulties, non-boarding inspections were conducted on eight of these vessels, in which no offences were detected or suspected. Charter recreational vessels were logged on thirteen of these occasions with one non-boarding inspection, and a full inspection of one vessel on landing. Recreational vessels made up a further four vessels and three non-boarding inspections, one of which was engaged in dredging and another in drift netting for herring.

The patrol vessels also recorded gear sightings on twenty occasions, which comprised of fixed nets, lobster pots, and whelk pots, with a closer inspection of the gear or markers on five occasions. The first of these was a net which was assumed abandoned or lost and was seized, and a further two had minor offences for marking of gear, however contact was made directly with the persons involved who rectified the issues within 24 hours.

There were two opportunities for joint working with Essex police marine unit, the first using both Tamesis and Vigilant for boarding and pacing training, and the second when officers from the marine unit joined Tamesis for a patrol of the Barrow Deep and got the opportunity to see first hand how the vessel conducts cockle grab sampling.

## **Conservation/Survey Work**

### *Surveys*

Following a crew familiarisation trip the cockle grab survey of Area 7 (the Dengie, Ray, and Buxey) commenced in April as usual. One significant difference this year was the addition of over 100 additional sample points in the subtidal section of the Ray Sand Channel and Buxey edge in response to the demand for a clam survey and proposed trial fishery.

Within the TECFO the outer edges of Area 2 & 3 and the East and West Barrows were also surveyed from Tamesis, with area 1 and 12 remaining to be completed.

With significant crew and time limitations, the BCRC Oyster survey has not as yet been conducted.

### *Marine Mammal observations*

Marine mammals were logged on twenty-four occasions with seal sightings recorded from Southend up to the Wallet, including large colonies (over 100 individuals) on the Ray Sand and groups of twenty or more on the Maplin Sands and in the river Roach. Porpoises were recorded on five occasions in the vicinity of the Colne and Blackwater, with a pod of five observed on one occasion.

## **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 was put on the hard in Brightlingsea for cleaning and had new propellers and new anodes fitted. An additional requirement by MECAL for this year was an in-water lightship assessment which was conducted and concluded successfully and the report was submitted to MECAL.

Vigilant was taken out of the water for her 800-hour service and some remedial work on the rubbing strip, after which it was re-launched and returned to the floating pontoon ready for tasking. The decision was taken to switch certifying authority from YDSA to MECAL to bring the vessel into line with the other vessels in the fleet, and this was successfully done with coding remaining at Category 3 restricted.

## **Other Information**

### *Statistics*

During this period FPV Vigilant put to sea ten times taking 670 litres of fuel and cover a patrol distance of 581 nautical miles. Tamesis has also been at sea on sixteen occasions taking 1789 litres and covering 273 nautical miles.

### *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 subject to tasking and crew requirements.

Colm O'Laoi

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