



Agenda Item – C6

Compliance and Enforcement Update

Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority Enforcement report for the period February 2025 – June 2025

Introduction

In undertaking its regulatory responsibilities, KEIFCA starts from the position that most people, organisations, and industries that use the marine area in the KEIFCA district are compliant with the regulations and controls that affects them. KEIFCA works to try to ensure that all parties understand both what rules apply to their industry and the justification for this regulation. Full compliance with national and local legislation is the overall aim of the Authority.

This aim is best achieved through the adoption of an adaptive co-management approach to fisheries management. Adopting the 'Prevention, Intelligence and Enforcement' model used by police forces across the UK, we are making best use of proven methods, using a proportionate approach, and ensuring the taxpayer receives value for money.

Engagement Activity

Engaging and educating stakeholders is essential to achieving our compliance objectives. This is actively pursued through both in-person patrols and remote channels such as social media and our website. KEIFCA have supported colleagues at the MMO to provide advice on new I-VMS requirements for the under 10m commercial fleet. We have also continued to raise awareness on compliance with recreational angling regulations by distributing free minimum size stickers and business cards at popular angling hotspots and tackle shops. Angling activity has increased dramatically as weather improved and bass fishing opened, and our officers have remained diligent in patrolling key coastal and maritime locations, reinforcing awareness of minimum size regulations and seabass recovery measures. As always, we encourage open communication between the fishing community and IFCOs, responding to numerous inquiries from both commercial and recreational fishers seeking clarification on byelaws and other legislation.

Intelligence Activity

This spring, IFCA and the MMO have continued to collate and share intelligence via our purpose-built intelligence system "Clue." The system modernises and standardises intelligence reporting and sharing among partner organisations along the coast, improving the searchability of data, linking compliance risks, and helping deliver effective enforcement planning.

There has been a huge uptick in intelligence reporting as fishing activity has increased, with 341 reports received and processed by KEIFCA. These reports identified potential breaches of legislation across various categories, including scallop dredging in prohibited areas, bass regulation breaches in both the commercial and recreational sector, shore netting, I-VMS, and shellfish gathering. All intelligence reports are thoroughly assessed, collated, and used to inform enforcement priorities through biweekly Tasking and Coordination Group (TCG) meetings. TCG taskings provide enforcement officers with clear direction on addressing key non-compliance issues, enabling the planning of targeted patrols for maximum impact.

Enforcement Activity

Joint working

Joint working with partner agencies has been extensive in the last period. In March KEIFCA officers carried out cross-warrant training with Environment Agency fisheries enforcement officers enabling each agency to enforce the other's legislation. In April, KEIFCA and Eastern IFCA officers supported an East Marine Team MMO led operation to target bass fishery compliance when the fishery opened on the first of the month. The operation ran over three days, and during the operation the team achieved 8 FV landings, 10 premise inspections and 20 transport inspections.

This was followed up in May with the KEIFCA led "Operation Labrax" supported by the East Marine Team and Essex Police Marine Unit, with the aim of providing a clear message of multiagency coordination and collaboration on the enforcement of the Bass regulations. Throughout the operation MMO and Police officers worked alongside KEIFCA officer to conduct boarding inspections at sea and landing inspections of vessels in port, from both the commercial and recreational sector. With 16 vessel inspections completed and over 40 fishers engaged with from both commercial and recreational sectors, clear message of compliance was sent to all those participating in the bass fishery. A major success included the interception of a key vessel of interest at sea, suspected of misreporting gear type for bass catches. Joint agency patrols with partners at the MMO and Essex Police Marine unit meant that officers could address a wider scope of relevant regulations, while simultaneously showcasing the strong collaborative working relationships within maritime enforcement.



Above: KEIFCA and MMO officers aboard FPV Vigilant during OPERATION LABRAX.

After this, KEIFCA participated in Op EMSTARA, a coordinated multi-agency law enforcement operation to support of the AQUAPOL Maritime Security Control Week (MCSW) between 27th-30th May 2025. The Joint Maritime Security Centre (JMSC) orchestrated the simultaneous deployment of a vast array of maritime enforcement agencies, including: Border Force, Police, Royal Navy, MMO, Gangmaster and Labour Abuse Authority, Coastguard and Home Office Intelligence. The aim was to seek to disrupt serious criminality and prevent offending at sea and increase joint working and intelligence sharing capabilities. A total of 74 boardings and engagements were achieved across the three operating days, which also supported wider AquaPol Maritime Security Control Week objectives and high-visibility deterrence in the maritime domain.

Cockles

All cockle fisheries were closed in this period.

Marine Protected Areas

Marine Protected Areas continue to be monitored from sea, from shore and remotely using AIS and VMS vessel tracking. Three additional MCZ areas due to

be closed to bottom towed fishing gear in 2025: Dover to Deal, Goodwin Sands and Swanscombe. This will almost double the extent of prohibited areas for bottom towed gear from 236 km² to a vast area of 406 km² of sea area in Kent and Essex waters. This massive increase in protected areas will logically increase the need for regular sea patrols to cover these designations, however the timely arrival of the new Essex-based 10.5m cabin RIB "Nemo" (due to be delivered in 2025) will provide the ideal platform for this work.

Sea patrols in Essex have been conducted aboard FPV Vigilant to monitor Essex Estuaries SAC and BCRC MCZ and no infringements were detected. In Kent, several patrols have covered prohibited areas for bottom towed gear including Thanet Coast and Folkestone Pomerania with no compliance issues and also shore patrols have covered the Medway No Take Zone with no incidents reported. KEIFCA also has closed areas for scallop dredging inside the 3nm limit in the Southern part of the district (Byelaw Area B). In the last period three offences were detected for fishing inside the closed area, and appropriate enforcement action is being taken.

Whelk Fishery

Whelk fishing has been well underway during this period with good catches reported when the weather permitted pots to be hauled. Officers focused on landing inspections from shore and gear inspections at sea during this period, with 12 inspections conducted with five offences detected. An investigation has concluded into the most serious of these offences relating to a large percentage of undersized whelks being landing by a vessel in Essex, for which a FAP of £500 was issued to cover the financial gain of the offence. Other offences were relatively minor, including unmarked gear and a landing where the master landed slightly over the 5% tolerance for under 53mm whelks. Throughout the next period, whelk fishery will be a lower priority as more inshore vessels switch over to gillnetting over the summer.

Bass

In response to emerging intelligence, KEIFCA have carried out two target bass operations in the last period. In the commercial sector there have been issues relating to misreporting authorised gear types, which we have combated with increased interception of bass netting vessels by our patrol vessels sea to account for gear in use and prevent mis recording when the catch is landed. Compliance issues have also been observed in the recreational sector however, with 6 offences detected for recreational anglers breaching bass regulations including retaining undersized bass and more than the 2 per person bag limit. These offences remain under investigation, and KEIFCA patrols are still being targeted to bass angling hotspots, and landing charter vessels.



Above: an undersized seabass. An increased rate of bass offences was detected in the recreational sector in the last period. KEIFCA have bolstered patrols in key angling hotspots to address this.

Offence Reports in the last quarter – 16 offences detected in total

- Statutory minimum size offence - High proportion of undersized whelks recorded on landing inspection of a commercial vessel – FAP issued and paid.
- Whelk Permit Byelaw Offence - more than 5% under 53mm whelks (small percentage) recorded on landing inspection of a commercial vessel – verbal warning issued.
- Whelk Permit Byelaw Offence – incorrect escape gaps - notice of offence issued for correction.
- Fishing instrument byelaw offence - Scallop dredging inside 3nm limit of Area B – FAP issued.
- Fishing instrument byelaw / scallop closed season offence - Scallop dredging inside 3nm limit of Area B / fishing for scallops in the closed season – offences remain under investigation.
- Marking of gear byelaw: Incorrect or unmarked gear offences x5. One fleet of lobster pots seized, other issued with notice of offence issued for correction.
- Bass regulations – x6 offences for undersized bass and/or retaining more than 2 bass per person – offences remain under investigation.

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