

Agenda Item – C6

Compliance and Enforcement Update

Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority Enforcement report for the period July - October 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. This included installing new signs in the Medway Estuary to promote awareness of the No Take Zone byelaw area, and publishing a news post to our website and "X" (formerly Twitter) on a recent enforcement action for recreational bass offences: <https://www.kentandessex-ifca.gov.uk/news/anglers-fined-for-retaining-23-undersized-sea-bass>



Kent and Essex IFCAs @KentEssexIFCA · Oct 8



KEIFCA issued FAPs to two anglers after detecting significant breaches of bass catch & size limits on Southend Pier.

🔗 Regs: max 2 bass/day, min size 42cm.

Enforcement protects stocks & promotes fair, sustainable fishing.

#Fisheries #Enforcement #Bass #Sustainability #KEIFCA



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 been sustained in the good weather, and our officers have remained diligent in patrolling key coastal and maritime locations, reinforcing awareness of minimum size regulations and seabass recovery measures, with 230 anglers engaged with and inspected over the last period. 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, IFCAs 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 149 reports received and processed by KEIFCA. These reports identified potential breaches of legislation across various categories including, bass regulation breaches in both the commercial and recreational sector, unregistered vessel activity, undersized fish, shellfish gathering, illegal gillnetting, whelk permit offences and more. 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 agency working

Joint working included patrols with MMO and Environment Agency. However the main joint agency effort this summer has involved targeted operations to address shellfish gathering activity, particularly along the beaches surrounding Southend-on-Sea.

The public has a right to fish in tidal waters, including collecting shellfish from the foreshore for personal consumption. However, this right does not extend to commercial harvesting without the necessary permissions. Due to the overlapping regulatory responsibilities in this area, coordinated partnership working remains essential.

Regulatory Agencies Responsibilities for Shellfish Gathering

Food Standards Agency (FSA): Oversees national shellfish safety, including area classification and monitoring for contamination.

Local Authorities (e.g. Southend Council Environmental Health Officers – EHOs): enforce food safety regulations locally, especially relating to shellfish from unclassified waters or without documentation. Have power to seize shellfish if gathered in excessive quantity.

Kent & Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (KEIFCA): Regulates the sustainable harvesting of shellfish through byelaws for minimum sizes, protected areas, and permit requirements.

Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA): Regulates labour in commercial shellfish gathering and investigates potential worker exploitation.

Determining whether shellfish gathering is commercial remains challenging, as there are no defined legal limits on personal collection. However, FSA guidance specifies that quantities up to 5 kg per person per day can be considered recreational, and this threshold assists EHOs in enforcement decisions.

Throughout the summer, KEIFCA officers have conducted multiple shellfish gathering patrols over low water, many in collaboration with Southend Council EHOs. These patrols resulted in 29 individuals being inspected and four offences recorded for undersized Manila clams contrary to KEIFCA byelaws.

A key example of this joint work took place over the weekend of 2–3 August 2025, when KEIFCA officers supported a multi-agency operation led by Southend-on-Sea City Council to tackle illegal shellfish harvesting. Partners included the Council's Regulatory Services, Community Safety and CCTV teams, the Marine Management Organisation (MMO), and the GLAA. On 2 August, officers engaged with 11 individuals, resulting in two voluntary surrenders, one

detention notice, and the seizure of 116 kg of shellfish and several items of equipment by EHOs due to excess quantities inconsistent with personal use. The operation demonstrates the necessity of joint working in addressing illegal shellfish harvesting and protecting public health.

Cockle fishery enforcement

Due to unforeseen challenges associated with implementing the new Regulating Order for the Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery (TECFO), the Cockle Fishery Flexible Permit Byelaw (permit fishery) unusually opened first this year, commencing in July. The permit fishery now includes additional areas, notably the Margate Sands complex off the North Kent coast.

A full operational plan was implemented to support enforcement activity, with officers briefed in June. Early priorities focused on ensuring that all vessels completed biosecurity and gear inspections before the opening of the season, followed by damage rate inspections through at-sea boardings once fishing commenced.

During the permit fishery, 17 damage rate boardings were conducted, of which 9 exceeded the 10% damage threshold. In each case, the master was instructed to adjust gear or fishing methods to reduce damage immediately. It is noted that most higher damage rates occurred in Area 17 (Margate Sands), where cockles are naturally thinner-shelled and therefore more susceptible to damage.

Permit fishery compliance levels on landing were high, with only four verbal warnings issued for minor infringements such as failure to provide notice of landing and minor overloading. However, one offence relating to a non-nominated person operating a permitted vessel remains under investigation.

The TECFO fishery opened in August, with the newly licensed 15 vessels commencing fishing under revised inspection criteria, where only the “rejected” cockles discarded from riddles were sampled for damage assessment. All inspected vessels (100%) passed their damage rate inspections, allowing compliance priorities to shift toward landings. Compliance remained excellent, with only five minor infringements identified from 89 landing inspections. The fishery concluded successfully at the end of October.

REM fleet-wide trial

Officers have continued to work with industry to support the rollout of Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) within the Thames Estuary cockle fisheries. REM is a collective term for integrated on-board systems that include cameras, gear sensors, and high-resolution tracking devices, allowing vessel activity, position, and gear use to be monitored remotely.

Following a successful pilot on two TECFO vessels in 2024, all 15 licensed vessels voluntarily participated in a fleet-wide REM trial in 2025. Cockle fishing within the KEIFCA district is subject to tight spatial management and takes place within several Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), where suction dredge gear is classed as relatively high impact. REM therefore provides an important tool for demonstrating compliance, improving monitoring of fishing effort, and supporting the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) process required by Natural England.

Two suppliers, Fastview360 and Rewire Security, provided systems incorporating GPS tracking with high positional accuracy, Bluetooth sensors to detect dredge deployment and retrieval, and CCTV cameras focused on the dredge, riddle, and hold. Together, these provide comprehensive data on vessel movements and fishing operations.

Despite minor technical issues during installation, the results have been highly positive. The systems provided accurate tracking data, reliable gear-in-water detection, and high-quality video footage confirming fishing activity. The trial has demonstrated that REM can significantly enhance both enforcement and scientific monitoring, offering objective evidence of activity, promoting compliance across the fleet, and providing a robust dataset to allow flexibility within future fishery management. KEIFCA officers have developed a strong working understanding of the REM technology, and industry participants have also gained valuable experience in its operation, putting both in a strong position for further REM development as a fishery management tool next season.

Marine Protected Areas Enforcement

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) continue to be monitored through a combination of sea patrols, shore patrols, and remote vessel tracking using Automatic Identification System (AIS) and Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) data.

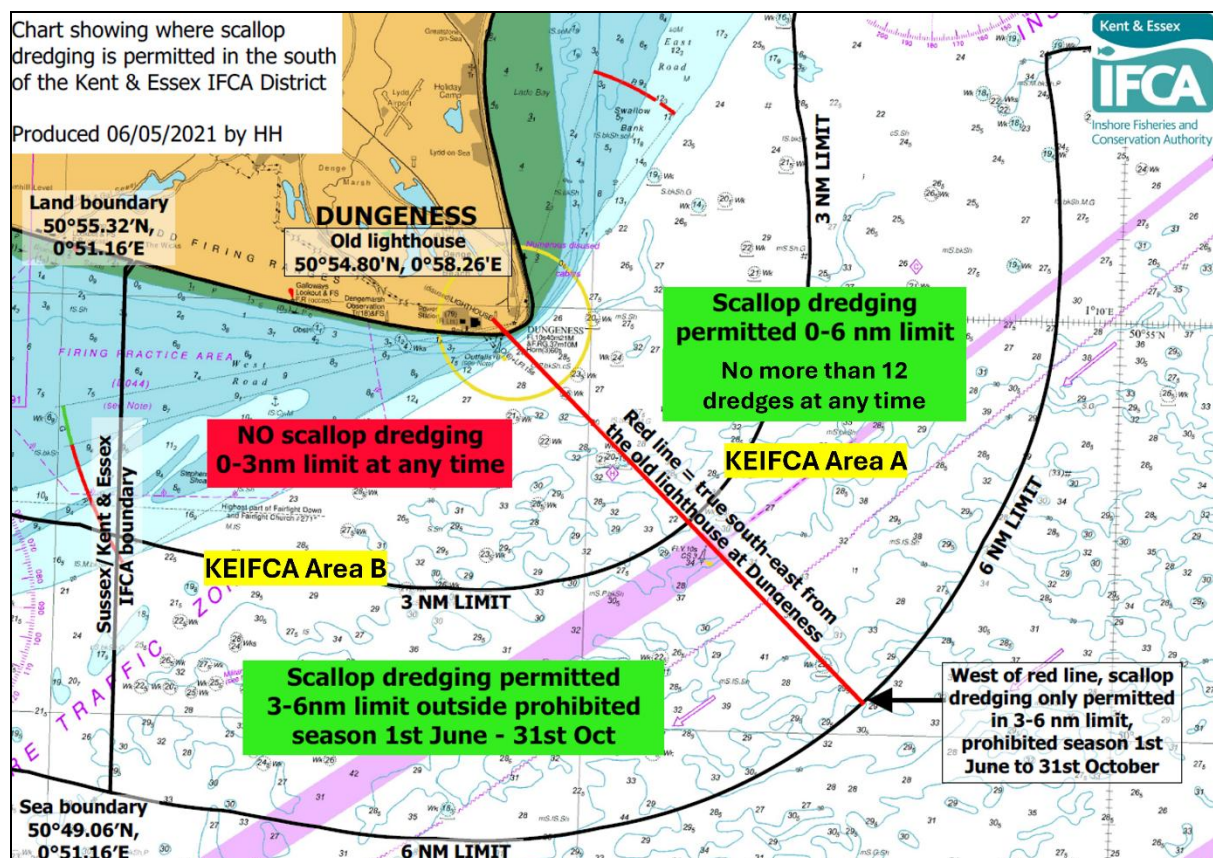
In Essex, patrols conducted aboard FPV Vigilant have focused on the Essex Estuaries Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne Estuaries Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ), with no infringements detected. In Kent, several patrols were undertaken in and around Thanet Coast and Folkestone Pomerania MCZ, both of which prohibit the use of bottom-towed gear; compliance was excellent throughout.

Shore-based and RIB patrols also continued to monitor the Medway No Take Zone (NTZ), with no incidents recorded. During one joint operation supported by police drone surveillance, a vessel was observed fishing close to the NTZ boundary but was confirmed to be operating legally just outside the restricted area.

KEIFCA also continues to investigate serious alleged breaches of scallop dredging restrictions in the southern part of the district (Byelaw Area B), where the

prohibition on scallop dredging within three nautical miles (3nm) of the coast has been in continuous effect since 1997. This measure is vital for the protection of sensitive benthic habitats and juvenile scallop stocks, acting as a nursery area allowing scallops to spill into the sounding areas to be fished. Scientific literature consistently highlights that scallop dredging can cause significant and long-lasting damage to seabed ecosystems, while fishing during the statutory closed season (June–October) can undermine spawning and recruitment of this lucrative shellfish.

The ongoing case concerns multiple suspected breaches, including 12 incidents within the 3nm closed area, five during the closed season, and ten additional logbook offences. The master and owner have been interviewed under caution, and a case file has been submitted for prosecution. The alleged offences represent sustained and high-impact non-compliance causing environmental harm and financial gain. Prosecution is considered firmly in the public interest, to uphold the integrity of the regulatory framework, ensure fairness among fishers, and deter future offending.



Above: chart showing the byelaws relating to scallop dredging in the Southern part of the KEIFCA district. Scallop dredging has been prohibited inside the 3nm limit of Area B since 1997, and this area serves as a nursery area for scallops to spill into neighbouring fishing grounds.

Whelk Enforcement

Whelk fishing has been reduced as usual over the summer months, where most inshore vessels turn to gillnetting rather than whelk potting. Five commercial whelk inspections were conducted, and two offences were detected, one for a small quantity of undersized whelks and one for using a riddle with bar spacing less than the required 25mm. In addition, officers located a fleet of whelk pots at sea that had been reported lost by a local fisherman a few months previously. The lost pots were hauled onboard the patrol vessel to be retrieved and returned to their owner.

Bass Enforcement

Bass remains a key focus for enforcement activity due to ongoing reports of non-compliance throughout the season. Officers have continued to conduct targeted inspections across both the commercial finfish and recreational angling sectors to ensure adherence to current bass regulations. Inspections have been intelligence-led, focusing on known fishing hotspots and individuals or vessels of interest.

During the period, 21 commercial finfish vessels were inspected, with no offences detected relating to bass regulations. In the recreational sector, 230 angling inspections were carried out, resulting in one offence for the retention of an undersized bass.

In addition, an offence detected in the previous reporting period involving the retention of 23 undersized bass was concluded through the issue of Financial Administrative Penalties (FAPs) to two anglers.

Overall compliance within both the commercial and recreational sectors remains high, and continued targeted patrols will be maintained to deter offending and protect this important species.

Offence Reports in the last quarter

KEIFCA Byelaw (Minimum Size): 7 verbal warnings issued and catches seized for minor infringements.

Whelk Permit Byelaw: 1 verbal warning for undersized whelks; 1 verbal warning for use of a riddle with bar spacing less than 25 mm; and 1 fleet of lost/stolen whelk pots seized and returned to the owner.

Cockle Permit Byelaw: 4 verbal warnings for minor infringements, and 1 offence under investigation relating to a non-nominated master operating a permitted cockle vessel.

Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery Order (TECFO): 5 verbal warnings issued for minor infringements.

National Bass Regulations: 1 verbal warning for the retention of an undersized bass, and 2 Financial Administrative Penalties (FAPs) issued for the retention of a significant quantity of undersized bass.

Marking of Gear Byelaw: 1 fleet of unmarked pots seized.

Fishing Instrument Byelaw / Scallop Closed Season: Offences relating to scallop dredging inside the 3 nm limit of Area B and fishing for scallops during the closed season have been referred for prosecution.

Hayden Hurst, Principal Compliance & Enforcement Officer