

Agenda Item – C6

Compliance and Enforcement Update

Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority Enforcement report for the period November 2025 to January 2026

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 on piers to promote minimum sizes for recreational anglers.

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 decreased significantly with less daylight and poor weather, although our officers have remained diligent in patrolling key coastal and maritime locations, reinforcing awareness of minimum size regulations and seabass recovery measures, with 69 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 marked decline in intelligence reporting as fishing activity has decreased, with 69 reports received and processed by KEIFCA. These reports identified potential breaches of legislation across various categories including, wildlife crime relating to seals, bass regulation breaches in both the commercial and recreational sector, 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 patrols during the reporting period included collaboration with Sussex IFCA, Environmental Health Officers (EHOs), and the Marine Management Organisation (MMO).

KEIFCA officers undertook a joint sea patrol with Sussex IFCA aboard FPV *Watchful* while FPV *Nerissa* was out of service for scheduled maintenance. The patrol focused on monitoring scallop dredging activity near the district boundary off Dungeness, specifically within Byelaw Area B, which is closed to scallop dredging within the 0–3 nautical mile limit. Six scallop vessels were observed operating in the area; all were fishing outside the restricted zone and were therefore compliant. In addition to delivering enforcement activity, this patrol provided valuable opportunities to build operational experience and strengthen working relationships between the two authorities.

During the November to January period, shellfish gathering activity decreased overall due to seasonal conditions and reduced daylight hours. Nevertheless, KEIFCA officers continued to conduct targeted low-water patrols, undertaking joint patrols with Southend-on-Sea City Council EHOs where possible. This approach ensured effective oversight of both fisheries byelaws and food safety requirements, particularly in relation to shellfish from unclassified waters and excessive quantities. Offences relating to breaches of minimum size byelaws for

Manila clams were detected during this period and are currently under investigation.

Regular joint shore-based patrols were also carried out with the MMO. These included KEIFCA IFCOs supporting MMO Marine Licence inspections, and MMO officers assisting with KEIFCA whelk permit byelaw inspections. This reciprocal working has improved shared understanding of enforcement processes, strengthened professional networks, and supported more effective intelligence sharing.

IFCOs also participated in joint training exercises with the Essex Police Marine Unit and Sussex IFCA focused on cross-decking operations, which involved high-speed boarding manoeuvres from rigid inflatable boats (RIBs). The exercises provided valuable opportunities to refine boat handling skills, improve coordination during boarding procedures, and practice safe and effective officer transfer between vessels. In addition to the technical training benefits, the exercises helped strengthen professional relationships between KEIFCA officers and partner agencies, fostering better collaboration for future operational deployments.



Above: joint training exercises with the Essex Police Marine Unit on cross-decking operations

Cockle fishery enforcement

All cockle fisheries have been closed during the period.

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, sea patrols conducted aboard FPV Vigilant have been more limited during this period due to poor weather conditions, reduced daylight hours, and scheduled vessel maintenance. Where patrols were possible, activity focused on the Essex Estuaries Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and the Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne Estuaries Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ), with no infringements detected. In Kent, sea patrols were undertaken through Thanet Coast and Folkestone Pomerania MCZs and no offences were detected.

Shore patrols also continued to monitor the Medway No Take Zone (NTZ), with no incidents recorded.

Whelk Enforcement

Whelk fishing has picked up during this period, where many inshore vessels turning to whelk potting as temperatures have cooled. Seven commercial whelk inspections were conducted, and two minor offences were detected for very small quantity of undersized whelks. Whelk inspections on landing to assess minimum size remain a top priority throughout the winter months.

Bass Enforcement

Bass continues to be a key focus for enforcement due to ongoing reports of non-compliance throughout the year. KEIFCA officers have carried out intelligence-led inspections across both the commercial finfish and recreational angling sectors, concentrating on known fishing hotspots and vessels or individuals of interest. While bass catches have declined during this reporting period, enforcement activity has remained targeted and proactive.

In the commercial sector, four finfish vessels that retained bass were inspected, and all were found to be compliant with bass regulations. In the recreational sector, 69 angling inspections were undertaken, resulting in two offences for retention of undersized bass including a charter vessel operator.

Overall, compliance remains high across both sectors. Targeted patrols will continue to safeguard bass populations, deter illegal activity, and support sustainable management of this important species.

Offence Reports in the last quarter

- **Minimum sizes byelaw (finfish):** Four verbal warnings were issued to recreational anglers for retaining small quantities of undersized fish, predominantly whiting.

- **Minimum sizes byelaw (shellfish):** Two offences are currently under investigation involving intertidal hand gatherers retaining significant quantities of undersized Manila clams.
- **Bass Regulations:** Two verbal warnings were issued to recreational anglers, including a charter vessel skipper, for retention of undersized bass contrary to national regulations.
- **Whelk fishery:** Two verbal warnings were issued for retention of small quantities of undersized whelks.
- **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 summonsed, with a prosecution hearing scheduled for June 2026.

Hayden Hurst, Principal Compliance & Enforcement Officer