



## **Agenda Item C6 Compliance and Enforcement Update**

### **Enforcement report for the period November 2024 to January 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. We have continued to raise awareness and educate the public on compliance with recreational angling regulations by distributing free minimum size stickers and business cards at popular angling hotspots and tackle shops. While winter has seen a notable decline in angling activity, our officers have remained diligent in patrolling key coastal and maritime locations, reinforcing awareness of minimum size regulations and seabass recovery efforts. Additionally, we have updated and renewed key legislative infographics, which will be featured in the 2024 tide tables for the Port of London, Crouch Harbour Authority, and other important ports. 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 winter, IFCAs and the MMO have continued to enhance and refine the new, 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.

Despite the quieter winter months, intelligence reporting been maintained at a reasonable level, with 146 reports received and processed by KEIFCA. These reports identified potential breaches of legislation across various categories, including scallop dredging, whelk potting, control regulation violations, illegal netting, and vessel movements. 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 operations have continued through the winter, but to a lesser degree due to the overall decline in fishing activity during the colder months. Our officers have worked primarily with Marine Management Organisation officers, conducting patrols focused on net measurements for pelagic sprat and herring trawlers operating out of Leigh on Sea, as well as ensuring compliance with recreational angling regulations at Southend Pier. Additionally, officers participated in a joint shore patrol in North Kent alongside Fisheries Enforcement Officers from the Environment Agency, with an aim of raising awareness of shared intelligence priorities and strengthening collaborative working relationships.

### *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 km<sup>2</sup> to a vast area of 406 km<sup>2</sup> 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 (due to be delivered in May 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.

### *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 boarding inspections at sea during this period, with five inspections conducted with no offences detected under the permit byelaw. An investigation is ongoing following the seizure of forty-nine illegal whelk pots at the beginning of November has been progressing, with the master having now attended interview under caution, the case file is awaiting review from KEIFCA's legal advisors. Throughout the next period, whelk fishery inspections will remain a key priority, including further gear inspections at sea, and landing inspections to assess catch from shore.

### *Bass*

In November, commercial netters were still catching bass within the district. In response to emerging intelligence, KEIFCA patrol vessels were tasked to deter and intercept a number of instances of illegal bass drift netting activities off the Kent coast. However, as winter set in, catches declined sharply, with only a few sporadic reports of bass landings into December. The fishery remains open to both commercial and recreational fishers throughout January but will close to all parties in February and March, permitting catch-and-release only. During this closure, KEIFCA will remain vigilant to ensure that bass is not being retained for commercial sale or personal consumption.

### **Offence Reports in the last quarter – 4 offences detected in total**

- X1 offence for breaching gear construction requirements of whelk permit byelaw. Forty nine whelk pots seized as evidence and investigation is ongoing.
- X2 offences for unmarked gear – lobster and whelk pots
- X1 offence for a recreational angler retaining undersized fish.

### **Scientific dispensations issued:**

Four scientific dispensations have been issued since September, granting exemption from KEIFCA byelaws including London Gateway trawl surveys and a Natural England Project researching smelt distribution in the Medway Estuary.

*Hayden Hurst, Lead Compliance Officer*