



## **Agenda Item – C6**

### **Compliance and Enforcement Update**

#### **Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority**

#### **Enforcement report for the period January 2026 to May 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**

Engagement and education remain central to achieving compliance objectives, delivered through both officer patrols and digital channels such as social media and the website. Activity during the period included installation of new signage in the Medway Estuary to promote awareness of the No Take Zone, and on piers to highlight minimum sizes for recreational anglers.

Officers continued to promote compliance with recreational angling regulations by distributing minimum size stickers and information cards at key angling locations and tackle shops. With increased angling activity during improved weather, patrols were intensified at key hotspots, with 250 anglers engaged and inspected. Engagement focused on enforcing minimum size and bass regulations, especially during the February–March bass closed season.

KEIFCA also maintained open communication with stakeholders, responding to enquiries from both commercial and recreational fishers regarding byelaws and legislation.

In addition, KEIFCA delivered two workshops in Spring 2026 (Kent and Essex) to support engagement with the commercial fleet on future bass management. A total of 24 industry representatives attended. Both sessions followed a consistent format, using interactive voting and group discussion to gather feedback on a

potential drift net trial and wider recommendations from the Bass Authorisations Review.

### **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 an uptick in intelligence reporting as fishing activity has increased gradually, with 100 reports received and processed by KEIFCA. These reports identified potential breaches of legislation across various categories including, scallop dredging offences, bass regulation breaches in the closed season, shellfish hand gathering activity, undersized fish, 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**

#### ***Manila clam trial***

A significant amount of enforcement resource was allocated to monitoring the Manila clam trial fishery during March and April, with four vessels participating. Activity included a combination of at-sea boarding inspections and on-board observer trips to assess damage rates, alongside landing inspections conducted by shore-based teams to check catch weights and carry out minimum size compliance checks.

The trial successfully gathered data on fishing effort, and compliance with spatial restrictions and other management measures set out in the Code of Conduct was monitored and maintained throughout.

#### ***Cockle fishery enforcement***

All cockle fisheries remained closed during the reporting period while beds were surveyed in preparation for the upcoming 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, sea patrols conducted aboard FPV Vigilant have been more limited during this period due to survey priorities. 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 activity increased during this period as the inshore season reached its peak, alongside the issue of new permits at the start of the financial year in April. Eight commercial whelk inspections were conducted. Three minor offences were detected, relating to failure to renew a permit and the retention of a small proportion of undersized whelks. One more serious offence was also identified, involving the retention of a significant quantity of undersized whelks contrary to permit byelaw conditions; this case remains under investigation.

Landing inspections to assess minimum size compliance remain a priority. However, with FPV *Nerissa* now returned from refit, the Kent team's sea patrol effort will also focus on gear hauling inspections.

### ***Finfish Enforcement (including bass)***

Bass continues to be a key focus for enforcement due to ongoing reports of non-compliance, principally within the recreational angling sector. Patrol efforts have therefore concentrated on known fishing hotspots, as well as vessels and individuals of interest.

In the commercial sector, no bass-related offences were detected. However, a commercial netter was issued with a verbal warning for exceeding the bycatch limit for tope, which is set at 45 kg. In the recreational sector, 250 angling inspections were undertaken, resulting in five offences for the retention of undersized fish, including bass.

Overall, compliance remains high across both sectors. Targeted patrols will continue to deter illegal activity and support conservation measures for bass and other finfish 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 and bass. One offence, involving the retention of a larger quantity of undersized fish, resulted in an Official Written Warning.
- **Whelk Fishery Flexible Permit Byelaw:** Two verbal warnings were issued for fishing without a valid permit due to failure to renew. A further verbal warning was issued for the retention of a small proportion of undersized whelks. One case remains under full investigation for the retention of a significant proportion of undersized whelks.
- **Tope (Prohibition of Fishing) Order 2008:** A verbal warning was issued to a commercial netter for retaining bycatch with a total live weight of tope in excess of the 45 kg daily limit.
- **Fishing Instrument Byelaw / Scallop Closed Season Byelaw:** Offences relating to scallop dredging within the 3 nm limit of Area B, and fishing for scallops during the closed season, are scheduled for a prosecution hearing in June 2026.

**Hayden Hurst, Principal Compliance & Enforcement Officer**