

Agenda Item – C6

Compliance and Enforcement Update

Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

Enforcement report for the period May 2026 to August 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 285 anglers engaged and inspected. Engagement focused on enforcing minimum size and bass regulations. KEIFCA also maintained open communication with stakeholders, responding to enquiries from both commercial and recreational fishers regarding byelaws and 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.

Intelligence reporting has increased during the period, with 127 reports received and processed by KEIFCA. These reports identified potential breaches across a range of regulatory areas, including bass fishing regulations, unregistered shore-set gillnetting, and non-compliance with whelk permit conditions. Intertidal shellfish gathering was the most frequently reported issue, accounting for 22% of all intelligence reports, with notable activity identified in Southend, Thanet, and the Isle of Sheppey. All intelligence submissions are subject to thorough assessment and analysis before being used to inform enforcement priorities through the bi-weekly Tasking and Coordination Group (TCG) process. TCG taskings provide officers with clear operational direction, enabling the deployment of targeted and intelligence-led patrols to address priority areas of non-compliance and maximise enforcement effectiveness.

Enforcement Activity

Cockle fishery enforcement

Cockle fishery enforcement has remained a significant operational priority throughout the summer period. The Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery Order (TECFO) 2026 opened on 21 June, providing access for 15 licensed vessels to one of the UK's most valuable shellfish fisheries. The fishery operates under a comprehensive management framework, including catch limits, spatial restrictions and seasonal controls designed to support both sustainable harvesting and conservation objectives.

A dedicated Operation Order was implemented prior to the fishery opening to ensure all vessels met regulatory requirements before fishing commenced. Pre-season activity included biosecurity inspections, gear measurements, verification of catch bags and load lines, and testing of newly installed Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) systems. During the season, enforcement activity has comprised landing inspections, offshore boarding inspections, damage-rate assessments and targeted patrols focused on compliance with spatial restrictions and husbandry measures.

The 2026 season also marked the successful introduction of REM across the entire TECFO fleet, with all 15 vessels voluntarily installing systems incorporating GPS tracking, gear sensors and CCTV coverage of fishing operations. REM has provided an additional layer of oversight, supporting compliance monitoring, verification of fishing activity and evidence-based management. Officers have worked closely with industry throughout the implementation phase, undertaking ongoing verification exercises and resolving technical issues to maximise the effectiveness of the technology.

To date, 47 inspections have been completed across the fleet, with compliance levels remaining high. The combination of traditional enforcement activity and REM monitoring has strengthened KEIFCA's ability to oversee the fishery whilst supporting adaptive management measures introduced during the season.

Preparations are also underway for the September opening of the Permit Cockle Fishery, which will involve 29 vessels harvesting stocks outside the TECFO area. A dedicated pre-season enforcement programme is currently being delivered, including biosecurity inspections, bag measurements, REM verification and gear testing. This year's fishery introduces several flexible management measures,

including weekly catch allocation exemptions and gear exemptions for qualifying vessels under 10 metres in length. Participation in these exemptions is conditional on a requirement to have a simplified REM device (gear sensor and tracking without CCTV cameras) and successful completion of pre-season trials, providing confidence that flexible management can be delivered without compromising compliance objectives.

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), Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) and now also Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) for vessels engaged in KEIFCA Cockle Fisheries.

After being under review for a considerable period of time, the updated Bottom Towed Fishing Gear (Prohibited Areas) Byelaw 2024 was signed by the minister and came into force in the district. This expanded on the six areas closed to bottom towed gear in 2017 to include three additional closed areas: Dover to Deal MCZ, Goodwin Sands (inshore) MCZ, and Swanscombe MCZ. KEIFCA patrol vessels have made dedicated patrols to monitor compliance in these new closed areas

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

Whelk Enforcement

Whelk fishing activity declined during this period as seawater temperatures rose through the summer. Six commercial whelk inspections were conducted, most of which were gear inspections. Four minor offences were detected, relating to unmarked gear and the retention of a small proportion of undersized whelks, all of which were dealt with by means of verbal warning of gear offence notices.

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 when landings inspections of fin-fishing vessels were conducted. However, a commercial gillnet was seized which had been abandoned at sea, although no ownership was established which prevented enforcement action being taken for not reporting missing gear as required by national regulations.

In the recreational sector, 285 angling inspections were undertaken, resulting in nine 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 and Outcome Reports in the last quarter

- **Minimum Sizes Byelaw (finfish):** nine offences were detected by recreational anglers for retaining small quantities of undersized fish, predominantly mackerel and bass. Of these, six were more serious and were fully investigated with suspected interviewed under caution. A number are still under investigation, and three written warnings have also been issued.
- **Whelk Fishery Flexible Permit Byelaw:** Two verbal warnings issued and two gear offence notices. A FAP was issued for an offence detected during the previous period following investigation for a commercial vessel landing a significant proportion of undersized whelks.
- **Lobster pot offences:** six gear offence notices issued for parlour pots that did not have the correct escape gap configuration, and for unmarked pots.
- **Hand gathering offences:** ten offences were detected for hand gathering activities, chiefly retention of undersized manila clams and retention of cockles without a permit. Some of these were dealt with by verbal warnings and educating the gatherers in cases where genuine recreational personal use was clear. For repeat offenders that had previously received warnings, joint work with Environmental Health Officers resulted in seizure of shellfish and harvesting equipment.
- **Fishing Instrument Byelaw / Scallop Closed Season Byelaw:** prosecution proceedings concluded for offences relating to a commercial vessel scallop dredging within the 3 nm limit of Area B, and fishing for scallops during the closed season, and miscellaneous electronic logbook offences. Guilty plea with significant mitigation provided by defence. Magistrates accounted for early guilty plea and "perilous financial situation" of the company in sentencing. Company fined £3,500 for all 31 offences, plus victim surcharge and partial costs, totalling £11,830. Master fined £932 for all 31 offences.

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