



Agenda Item C6

Compliance and Enforcement Update

Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

Quarterly Report for the period November 2021 - January 2022

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.

COVID-19

Throughout the pandemic KEIFCA have strived to be the first point of contact for the fishing industry and continue to work closely with partners such as the MMO to provide reliable intelligence on the impacts of COVID to DEFRA for national decision making. Officers have remained vigilant of personal safety and to this end are encouraged to take up vaccines, carry out lateral flow tests twice a week, and continue with mask wearing and basic hygiene practices. Desk-based work has been conducted from home where possible in accordance with latest government advice, however patrol activity has remained normal.

Prevention Activity

Public engagement remains key to achieving compliance objectives and is promoted in person during patrols and remotely via social media and our website. Building on the concept of the ever-popular KEIFCA minimum size stickers as engagement tool for the angling community, we installed permanent minimum size signs on piers and angling hotspots across both Kent and Essex. We have also created a miniature version - the minimum size business card - to be handed out by pier operators when a ticket is purchased in private piers where you must pay to go fishing. These efforts have increased awareness of minimum sizes, particularly among visiting anglers from outside the district, and those that are new to the sport. Officers have also dedicated time to help whelk fishermen ensure that their gear is compliant, carrying out checks on the quayside before

the pots are deployed at sea. As always, we encourage the fishing community to communicate with IFCOs if they require clarification on our byelaws or other legislation.

Intelligence Activity

As is usual in the winter months, intelligence reporting has remained at the same relatively low levels as the last period, with another 48 reports processed by KEIFCA. Information received covered issues such as non-compliance with byelaws and local COVID outbreaks. All intelligence reports are assessed and collated, and then used to inform the prioritisation of enforcement objectives through the biweekly Tasking and Coordination Group (TCG) meetings. TCG taskings give enforcement officers clear direction to focus on significant non-compliance issues. Setting clear taskings in this way has allowed our officers to focus on tackling high priority targets, but with fishing activity generally low throughout November, December and January, officers have been more available to address routine and lower risk compliance issues too.

Enforcement Activity

Joint working

Throughout this period, we have maintained frequent communication with partner agencies such as neighbouring IFCA's and the MMO to share information and intelligence via the TCG process. With the Thames and Blackwater herring fishery opening in this period, IFCOs have conducted several joint patrols with MMO officers to key ports, measuring nets to check that mesh size adheres to licence conditions. With the anticipated lifting of COVID restrictions we will aim to increase joint working in 2022.

Cockles

All cockle fisheries have been closed in the district throughout this period. One investigation from the 2021 TECFO season has been resolved with a Fixed Administrative Penalty (FAP) issued and paid by the offender, leaving one more offence under investigation.

Marine Protected Areas

Marine Protected Areas continue to be monitored from sea, from shore and remotely using AIS and VMS vessel tracking. 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, officers have been putting up signs to promote awareness of the Medway Nursey Area no take zone. With the anticipated national roll-out of Inshore Vessel Monitoring Systems (iVMS) in 2022, KEIFCA will be able to monitor all protected areas with management measures on a 24/7 basis, marking an enormous leap forward in the use of technology for environmental management at sea.

Whelk Fishery

Whelk fishing has been a staple of much of the inshore fleet in the last period, and this productive fishery has even attracted visiting vessels from outside the district.

As such, monitoring permit whelk fishery remained a key priority this winter. Off the Kent coast and in parts of the Thames catches have been good, and rates of spawning have been exceptionally high. Officers in both counties have been carrying out landing inspections of whelk vessels check minimum size, which is set at 53mm with a tolerance of 5% by weight. KEIFCA have two offences under investigation for setting whelk pots illegally, resulting in two fleets of gear being seized.

Bass

Shortly before Christmas the government released the 2022 bass regulations, limiting gear, season and catch limits of this stock which is still recovering from past overexploitation. Bass fishing was restricted to catch and release only to recreational anglers in December and will remain closed until March when a bag limit of 2 per person per day will apply again. For commercial fishers, bass landings have been allowed in the last period, but catches were low due to the time of year. As with previous years, commercial bass fishing in 2022 will be prohibited in February and March to protect spawning individuals. The main change in the legislation is that this year all commercial vessels can land bass caught by demersal trawls and seines and no written authorisation is required. However, trawlers are limited to a bycatch of 5% by weight and landings are capped at a maximum of 380 kg per month. Fishing by hook and line and by fixed gill net is also permitted this year, but only if the vessel has a specific authorisation on their licence issued by MMO. Fishing by drift nets remains illegal, and the minimum size for bass is set at 42cm for both the recreational and commercial sector.

Offence Reports in the last quarter

x8 offence notice for unmarked gear.

x1 offence for illegal whelk pots being deployed, resulting in the gear being seized. Offence under investigation pending identification of ownership.

x2 offence notice for using parlour pots fitted with illegal door release mechanisms. Gear seized.

x2 offences for recreational anglers retaining undersized fish. Suspects interviewed under caution and written warnings issued.

Training and developing staff

Eleven officers are warranted including the chief and assistant chief IFCO. Officers have recently attended a comprehensive interview skills (level 2) training course, which proved to be a useful refresher and built on existing knowledge with up to date legislation and tips from expert investigators. There is a suite of developmental courses scheduled for our officers in 2022 with COVID restrictions allowing for face to face training to resume fully.

Hayden Hurst

Lead Compliance Officer