

Kent & Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

MINUTES of a meeting of the Authority held in the Council Chamber, Gravesham BC Offices, Windmill Street, Gravesend, Kent, DA12 1DD on Tuesday 19 May 2026 at 10am.

Present: Mr J Lamb (MMO), Mr J Nichols (MMO), Mr W East (MMO), Mrs E Gilson (MMO), Mr J Rowley (MMO), Mr E Hannam (MMO), Mr R Turner (MMO), Ms T Ferry (MMO), Mr C Collins (MMO), Cllr M Lawes (KCC), Cllr T Prater (KCC),

Apologies: Cllr S Curry (Medway Council), Cllr J Finch (KCC), Mr A Baler (NE), Mrs D O'Shea (Office Manager)

In Attendance: Mrs K Goldsmith (Clerk, KCC), Ms S Martin (Financial Advisor, KCC), Dr W Wright (Chief Fishery Officer), Mr D Bailey (Deputy Chief IFC Officer), Dr P Haupt (Principal Scientific & Conservation Officer), Miss E Wyatt (IFCO), Miss G Welsh (IFCO), Mrs K Woods (Admin Officer), Mr J Stroud (ex-Chairman)

Laid around the table:

- i) Revised Appendix 2 to Agenda item B1 – emailed to members on 18 May 2026
- ii) Letter from Mr P Gilson

Members were advised that Mr Peter Wexham had stood down as an MMO appointee to the IFCA, after a period of ill health. The Chairman thanked Mr Wexham on behalf of the Authority for his commitment to the IFCA during his 12 years as an Authority Member.

The Chairman welcomed Cllr Tim Prater from KCC who replaced Cllr Jamie Henderson and advised that, following the recent local elections, Cllrs Coxshall, Fleming, Skeels, Goggin and Mulroney had either stood down or not been re-elected. Replacements from Thurrock, Essex County and Southend City Councils respectively had not yet advised replacements.

The Chairman welcomed Miss Katie Ansell from the University of Kent, who had requested to talk to members of the fishing industry on the subject of marine spatial squeeze. The Chairman encouraged the industry members in attendance to speak to Katie outside of the public Authority Meeting.

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE CHAIRMAN (A1)

Mr Lamb announced that he had decided to stand down as Chairman and thanked all staff, the present and previous committee members for helping to run a successful IFCA. Members placed on record their appreciation to Mr Lamb for his commitment, dedication and hard work throughout his tenure as Chairman of the IFCA and, before that, for his

long-standing service to the Sea Fishery Committee. Members recognised the considerable contribution he had made over many years, including the leadership, experience and steady support he had brought to the Authority and to the responsible management of local fisheries.

The Clerk to the Authority took the Chair and advised Members that they were required each year to nominate and select a Chairman and Vice Chairman.

Mr Turner nominated Mr John Nichols as Chairman, seconded by Mr J Lamb. No other candidates were proposed so Mr John Nichols was elected unopposed as Chairman.

Mr Nichols took the chair.

Mr Nichols thanked the Authority for the support he received as Vice Chairman for 21 years and pledged to do his best to serve the IFCA as Chairman.

Mr Nichols nominated Mr John Lamb as Vice Chairman, seconded by Mr Turner. No other candidates were proposed so Mr John Nichols was elected unopposed as Vice Chairman.

Mr Lamb thanked the Authority and gave assurance of his support to the Vice Chairman.

2. DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS (A2)

The Chairman requested Members declare any interests on the Agenda item prior to it being dealt with and advised that those with a disclosable prejudicial interest may not vote on that Agenda item.

Mrs E Gilson declared a pecuniary interest in cockle agenda items: B3, B4, B5, B7 and B8.

Mr C Collins declared a personal interest in recreational bass fishing: agenda item B9.

3. MINUTES OF 27 JANUARY 2026 (A3)

Members agreed that the minutes of the meetings held on 27 January 2026 were correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman. No matters were arising.

4. 2025/26 FINAL BUDGET MONITORING OUTTURN REPORT, ANNUAL RETURN AND INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT (B1)

The Financial Adviser presented the Budget Monitoring Report for the financial year ending 31 March 2026. Members were advised that the reported underspend for the year was £11.8k, but that £10.8k of the underspend related to a correction arising from the

implementation of the IFRS16 lease accounting requirements and therefore the underlying operational underspend was approximately £1k. Members were informed that an error had been identified in the accounting treatment of the Essex office lease under the IFRS16 reporting requirements. The lease payment, which falls due annually in January, should have been apportioned across financial years. However, the full lease cost had initially been recorded in 2025/26 rather than split appropriately between years. The Financial Advisor explained to Members that this was a one-off adjustment and that the resulting surplus had been transferred to General Reserves. Members noted that the issue did not affect the Kent office lease as the rental payments fall in April each year.

Members were informed that approximately £132k of DEFRA funding had been received during the year, of which just over £80k had been drawn down to fund grant-related expenditure and this was summarised in the table in section 2.2.

Members were reminded that £160.5k had been earmarked within reserves during 2024/25 to meet potential legal costs associated with the T24 Regulatory Order. Actual expenditure during 2025/26 for this totalled £46.2k and the remaining balance of £114.3k had been released back into General Reserves.

The Financial Advisor drew Members' attention to the table in section 2.4 of her report and explained that, as always, a cautious approach had been adopted to budgeting for KCC investment income, and the year-end figure was almost £82k more than had been budgeted. The surplus had been used to reduce the burden on reserves in contributing to major repairs and Workboat Code 3 upgrades for Nerissa, new server infrastructure at both offices and partitioning works at the Ramsgate office.

Members were advised that delays to the commissioning of Nemo had resulted in underspends on vessel-related budgets, including fuel, oil and harbour costs. The Financial Advisor clarified that although DEFRA-funded expenditure exceeded £80k, the reported variance was £31.8k, as staffing costs funded by the grant were recorded within the staffing budget rather than the DEFRA expenditure heading. Members were referred to Appendix 1 for the detailed budget, actual expenditure and variance analysis.

It was reported that 2 new quad bikes had been purchased on part-exchange with the 2023/24 quad bikes. The expenditure relating to the Nemo build of £62.3k had been capitalised; there was no depreciation costs for this year as Nemo was still classed as an asset under construction.

Members were referred to Appendix 2 for the Balance Sheet as at 31 March 2026. It was pointed out that movements from the previous financial year were minimal, notably £80k in fixed assets was reported, principally arising from an increased gross asset value for Nemo and for the Essex office Right of use Asset. The Authority's net worth was reported to have reduced by approximately £56k compared with the previous year.

The Financial Advisor explained to Members that the Pension Fund report for KEIFCA for 2025/26 was received after the meeting papers were sent out. The revised figures resulted in a movement of approximately £395k in both the pension liability and pension reserve. Although the liability had increased, the overall position remained significantly improved compared with 2021/22.

Members noted the detailed breakdown of Reserves balances and movements in the year provided in Appendix 3.

The Chairman thanked the Financial Advisor for her very clear reports.

The Chief Officer also thanked the Financial Advisor and the Office Manager and advised Members that KCC had adopted a new budget system part way through the financial year, with an entire new coding system, which had made for a challenging year.

In response to a question regarding how many staff were included in the pension scheme, the Chief Officer advised that all 14 members of staff were.

5. Treasury Management Strategy 2026/27 (B2)

Members received the Treasury Management Strategy for 2026/27 and the Financial Advisor gave details of where Members could find details of the Budget book on the KCC website.

Members were advised that KEIFCA funds continued to be invested through Kent County Council and the balances invested during 2025/26 and the associated investment arrangements were summarised within Section 1.3 of the report. The interest transferred by KCC to KEIFCA for the year totalled £133.7k.

In response to a question regarding whether alternative options for investment other than with KCC had been explored, the Financial Advisor stated that KEIFCA would need to consult with an Investment Expert on this matter.

Members discussed whether alternative investment would be as secure as with KCC as well as offering better rates and quick access. In response to a question about why balances were invested with KCC and not ECC, the Chairman and Chief Officer advised that it was purely historic but had always had the support of the committee's Essex County Councillors.

The Chief Officer suggested alternative investment could be looked into and made an agenda item at a future meeting.

Members **NOTED** the Treasury Management Strategy 2026/27 as explained in paragraph 2 with KEIFCA monies remaining on deposit with KCC, unless better opportunities are found, and **APPROVED** it for the year.

6. TECFO 2024 STOCK ASSESSMENT SURVEYS (B3)

The Principal Scientific & Conservation Officer (PSCO) reported that stock surveys of the principal harvesting areas on the Maplin and Foulness Sands commenced on 3 April 2026. Surveys were undertaken during the low ebb spring tides to maximise access to the drying sandflats, which extend up to three miles offshore in certain areas. The survey programme was completed over a period of four days, and a total of 501 quadrat samples were collected during the surveys. The sandflats were accessed from land using quad bikes and surveys were carried out by Fishery Officers working in teams of four. At each sample location, cockles were excavated from a 0.1 m² quadrat, counted, weighed, and assessed to determine age.

Members were advised that all 2025 spat currently remained below 14 mm in size. The majority of the 1–2 year class adult cockles were also below 14 mm; however, it was anticipated that a proportion of this stock may grow into the 16 mm size class before the opening of the fishery. The majority of the 2–3 year class and 3+ year class cockles were above 16 mm.

Surveys of additional cockle grounds outside the principal harvesting areas had been completed and that Area 7, 8 and 9 had been particularly productive in recent years. However, of the four key cockle beds located within these areas, only the East Barrows bed contained sufficient adult stock to be included in the calculation of this year's Total Allowable Catch (TAC). Members were advised that the TAC, as set out under Agenda Item B4, was based on the current stock of adult cockles together with projected stock growth calculated using long-term average growth rates.

A Member commented that the stock number and supporting graphs quoted cockle stock in numbers (millions) whereas in the cockle fishery management report at agenda item B4, stock was referred to in weight (tonnes) and requested that both metrics be included.

Members **NOTED** the report.

The Chairman drew Members attention to a letter (laid on the table at the meeting) from Mr Paul Gilson addressed to the Authority in which he expressed "*serious concern about the lack of effective enforcement of shellfish harvesting along the Kent and Essex coast*".

The Chief Fishery Officer reminded Members that KEIFCA had been working with Southend Council's Environmental Health representative, Sheira Fox, and Cllr Carole Mulroney on

introducing a Public Health Protection Order (Cllr Mulroney was not re-elected at recent local elections so was no longer an Authority Member). Members were advised that a Public Health Protection Order (PHPO) was a good piece of legislation which dealt with anti-social behaviour by way of on-the-spot fines. Southend Council had previously experienced issues with other legislation, such as Fixed Penalty Notices, being unsuccessful in Court. Members were told that KEIFCA were keen to re-engage with Southend Council on this matter and considered on-the-spot fines an ideal solution.

The Chairman thanked the Chief Officer for the update and commented to Members that this was not a new topic but one that had been discussed for a number of years.

In answer to a question about whether shellfish gathering was licensed, the Chief Officer advised that the activity is not currently licensed but as a general rule of thumb people could take up to 5kg for their own personal consumption. Members were told that there is a balance to be found between a public right to collect shellfish from the foreshore, and effective management of commercial scale operations and gang led activity. The difficulty faced by Southend Council was in defining "what is commercial"? They had been unsuccessful in the past when taking people to court and had moved to disruption tactics such as seizing shellfish collected in excess of 5kg and the equipment used.

Members were advised that legislation was in place to regulate sellers of shellfish and that the fines for not being registered and/or not having the correct certification were very significant and far higher than anything KEIFCA could issue under its byelaws.

The Chief Officer advised that if KEIFCA were to introduce legislation it would likely allow up to 5kg to be taken per person, with potentially a permit system in place for more than that amount, although the PHPO was the preferred option.

In response to a question around the activity being conducted by gangs, the Chief Officer advised that the Gangmaster Licencing Authority (GLA) were the appropriate regulator and that Southend Council had previously worked with the GLA.

Members questioned the extent of the problem and were advised by Officers that there were concentrated hotspots all along the coast but that Southend-on-Sea had always been targeted because of oysters.

The Chairman stated that KEIFCA would meet with the new Councillor for Southend to continue working towards the PHPO.

Members **NOTED** the letter received from Paul Gilson.

7. 2026 COCKLE FISHERY MANAGEMENT (B4)

Mrs E Gilson left the room.

The Chairman invited Mr Andrew Rattley to address the Authority on behalf of the Thames Estuary Fishermen's Association.

Our Thanks to the Chairman for allowing us to address the full Authority.

We welcome the opportunity to now be able to work productively with the management and authority on the TECFO cockle Regulating order after the frantic years leading to the granting of the order, which at times has felt that we have been at odds with each other.

Moving forward we as an Industry are just as determined as the management to continue to improve our relationship and cooperative working to ensure we continue to have the finest cockle fishery in Europe.

Our aims and aspirations for future working relationships.

We wish to make it very clear to the officers and the Authority members we are not trying to dictate what happens in the fishery, but merely trying to establish a far better co working relationship, with our suggestions and concerns moving forward.

1. Full use of the Remote Electronic Monitoring systems fitted to the vessels.

We, as do the Officers, have concerns on the Maplin sands, that there is abundant stocks of undersize cockles which concerns us on the viability of trips allocated. We very much appreciate the Officers efforts in continuing to address this and would like the opportunity, if possible, to explore the deep-water edges of areas 8 9 and 12 to ease the pressures on areas 4, 5 and 6 if needed. Hopefully this would allow for more intensive fishing in August and September when the juvenile stock will hopefully have grown. We would ask for an electronic meeting 2 weeks in to the fishery with the officers to discuss the fishing efforts and agree to change if needed as this will have given the fleet and the Officers a chance to review the fishing effort and electronic data of the catch. By having a very dynamic approach to the fishery with the Officers we aim to have a very positive relationship.

From a fishing and processing perspective in this current worldwide, geopolitical perspective with ever rising fuel and labour costs, it is imperative for us all to try and minimise the time at sea and being able to process as soon as possible to try and avert the issues with the heat and mixed species being landed to achieve the best yields possible from the catch, whilst working in an ever-challenging environment.

2. It would be advantageous to be able to go on prospecting trips throughout the season looking for new beds. We appreciate that the management would prefer this

within the first 4 weeks of fishing, however it would be more effective and productive if we were allowed more flexibility on this throughout the season, as it is possible if a new bed was found close to an existing bed but unclassified, it could be classified through the rapid method rather than the 12-week statutory method.

3. As we are a dredged fishery we strongly ask for us to be allowed to conduct dredge surveys in all areas with an Officer on board recording all the catch data, as this would possibly allow for increased quota throughout the season, and could potentially be used over a period of time to enhance the current survey data.

4. It would be advantageous over the season to have more direct meetings with the Officers and licence holders for discussion on fishing effort with concerns on individual area performance and flexibility on moving forward.

Once again, we thank the Chair for allowing us to address the Authority today. Should any members of the Authority wish to join us on any of the cockle fishing trips to gain fuller understanding of our Industry we would very much welcome you.

The Chairman informed Mr Rattley that KEIFCA would work with the industry, that he was always approachable and looked forward to continuing to work together.

The Deputy Chief Fishery Officer (DCFO) addressed the points raised by Mr Rattley and commented that he agreed that the past five years had been difficult for the industry but that it was now time to look to the future. He added that he agreed with Mr Rattley's comments about REM and that he shared the industry's concerns on working the sands this year. On the matter of the geo-political landscape and high fuel costs, the Deputy Chief Fishery Officer commented that KEIFCA recognised this and had reduced the number of trips to ease budgetary constraints. With regard to classification of new shellfish beds, Members were informed that this would be challenging. KEIFCA would be happy to have more meetings with industry throughout the season.

Members were advised that analysis of the survey data showed a recommended Total Allowable Catch (TAC) of 4,950 tonnes. This was a conservative figure which took account of current stock levels across multiple beds and the small size of much of the stock.

The Deputy Chief Officer informed Members that a meeting had been held with the cockle licence holders on 7 May to discuss management arrangements for the 2026 fishery, including proposed dates, area management and the number of trips per week.

It was reported that survey data and industry feedback had identified a significant concentration of effort in recent years. Specific management of Areas 4, 5 and 6 was therefore considered necessary to prevent other areas becoming built up with shell and

other material. Members were advised that proposed pre-season trips would support active management of lower-density beds, remove shell and other material, and create space to encourage future cockle stock growth. Licence holders would be able to land any sizeable stock harvested during these trips.

The Deputy Chief Officer advised that KEIFCA would continue to work with industry before the fishery opened to agree how the pre-season trips would be conducted and that management conditions for the low-density area trips would be developed with industry and implemented following liaison with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman.

- i. The maximum permitted catch will remain at 13.6m³ /500 baskets per fishing trip.
- ii. All usual TECFO requirements e.g. gear type, landing notice, REM, etc., must be followed.
- iii. Vessels must work the ground in straight tows across areas 4, 5 and 6.
- iv. Vessels must include tows across the full width of the sands including as close to the shore as possible.

Members considered the proposed management measures for the 2026 fishery as detailed (a) through to (i) in the recommendations section of the report.

Members were reminded that the licence fee had been increased from £10,885 to £11,299 for the 2026/27 fishery, following approval by the Authority in January 2026 and ministerial consent. Payment had been requested from licence holders and licences would be issued once payment had been made.

Members received an update on Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM). Officers reported that two vessels had piloted REM in 2024, following similar trials in other IFCA districts and Jersey. The system used gear-in-water Bluetooth technology and visual verification cameras. Following the success of the pilot, all 15 licensed TECFO vessels voluntarily installed REM systems during the 2025 season, with some financial assistance from KEIFCA. Officers continued to work closely with vessel operators to refine the system on each vessel.

The Deputy Chief Officer advised that KEIFCA Officers would continue to work with licence holders to explore how REM could provide greater flexibility in management and to ensure that fishers were comfortable with its use. Concern had been expressed over data protection and Officers planned to consult with industry on GDPR issues.

It was reported that within the Thames Estuary Cockerle Fishery (No. 2) Order 2024, KEIFCA may create reserves within the area of the order for experimental, management or scientific purposes (article 8(1)(a)). The Deputy Chief Fishery Officer explained to Members that the 2-year clam trial, which met the criteria of being an experimental fishery, required the trial areas not to be impacted by other fishing activities. The Officers' recommendation was that within an area shown in figure 1 of the report, fishing for cockles

would not be permitted for the duration of the Manila clam trial. It was proposed to review this reserve approach at the end of the trial.

The Chairman thanked the DCFO for his report and invited questions:

A Member commented that outcomes of and discussions at the industry meetings were not reported on and asked if these could be included in future reports.

In response to a question about why the HRA requirements or population densities were not included in the reports to explain how the TAC had been reached, the Deputy Chief explained that a lot of data was now included in the Management Plan unlike previously.

The Chief & Deputy Chief Officers thanked Members for their input and explained that they had been mindful to not overload Members with scientific and technical data but recognised that they may not have struck the right balance and apologised if Members would have liked more detail included.

A Member noted that Officers had some flexibility in some of the management measures, e.g. (b) but questioned whether more flexibility could be given throughout the course of the fishery.

The Deputy Chief Officer responded that there was scope for increased flexibility to a point but reminded Members that most cockle beds were within MPAs and the associated HRA requirements were such that there would come a point in the season when there would not be sufficient time for additional surveys to be completed.

Members **APPROVED** the recommendations of the 2026 Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery Management:

(a) The Total Allowable Catch (TAC) should be set initially at 4950 tonnes and that information related to the stocks will be continually reviewed throughout the season to ensure future sustainability.

(b) Allocation of additional TAC may be made in the event of significant new beds of cockles being located in the first four weeks of the fishery, to allow time for any necessary survey work. Reduction in TAC, and therefore a reduction in the number of trips, may be made in the event of very poor growth in the size of cockles.

(c) That the Chief IFCO be authorised, after consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairman, to implement changes to fishing controls to ensure future sustainability including for the purposes of (b). These will be communicated to Members following decisions being made.

(d) That the authority will allow for two trips, within the TAC allowance, to assist in active area management of lower density beds on the Maplin and Foulness Sands. These have been divided into weekly specified fishing periods which will run from 1800 hrs on

Sunday to 1200 hrs on Friday. During these periods, licence holders will be permitted to make the following specified number of landings.

21 June – 3 July (2 weeks)	1 specified landing per period on area 4, 5, 6. All other areas will be closed.
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(e) That the fishery will commence at **1800 hrs on 5 July 2026.**

(f) Provisional fishing allocations will be as follows, this will also be subject to further amendment;

The fishing season will be divided into weekly specified fishing periods which will run from 18:00 hrs on Sunday to 12:00 hrs on Friday and during these periods licence holders will be permitted to make the following specified numbers of landings (Reg. No. 7). This will maximise production when meat yields and quality are at their best.

5 July – 21 August (7 weeks)	2 specified landings per period
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23 August – 4 September (2 weeks)	3 specified landings per period
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6 September – 2 October (4 weeks)	2 specified landings per period
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(g) The maximum quantity of cockles that may be landed or carried on board will remain at 13.6m³ /500 baskets per fishing trip (approx. equivalent 11 tonnes).

(h) As is usual it is recommended that sections of Areas 1, 2 and 3 should be closed at all times during the period June - September inclusive. These areas are defined as inshore sections of Areas 1, 2 and 3 from Two Tree Island at Leigh-on-Sea in the West to The Coastguard Station at Shoeburyness in the East and also within the area of Shoeburyness East Beach. (This closure applies only to the area inside the moorings and where there are no moorings closer to the shore than a distance of 300 metres measured from mean high-water mark.)

(i) A section of area 6 of the regulated fishery be closed under the reserves provision of the Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery (No2) Order 2024, for the purposes of conducting manila clam fishery trials.

8. TECFO 2024 TRANSITIONAL LICENCE VARIATION – S.J. MEDDLE LTD (B5)

The Deputy Chief Officer reminded Members that the Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery Order 2024 replaced the Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery Order 1994 and provided the statutory framework for managing the Thames Estuary cockle fishery. The Order introduced a revised licensing and management regime intended to support sustainable exploitation of the fishery while allowing established fishing businesses to continue operating during the transition to the new arrangements.

Members were reminded that TECFO 2024 provided for transitional licences during the first seven years of the Order, from 2025 to 2031. These arrangements enabled established companies and vessels that had participated in the fishery under TECFO 1994 to continue operating, provided that the company remained in the same legal and beneficial ownership as of 30 January 2024, subject to limited exemptions.

Members were told that Article 6(5) set out the criteria for holding a transitional licence during the first seven years of the Order, including the requirement that, where the licence holder was a company, the company remained in the same legal and beneficial ownership as it was on 30 January 2024. Article 6(6) provided that a transitional licence would cease to be valid if the company changed legal or beneficial ownership, or both, during the transitional. However, Article 6(7) provided an exemption where a licence holder or shareholder had died or suffered physical or mental incapacity, provided the Authority was notified in writing, an application was submitted, and the Authority approved the continuation of the licence.

The Deputy Chief Officer informed Members that S.J. Meddle Ltd held a transitional licence under TECFO 2024 and had previously held a licence under TECFO 1994 under the same family ownership since 1994. The company applied for a transitional licence on 10 January 2025. The parent company, and therefore the *legal* owner of S.J. Meddle Ltd, was S.J. Meddle (Holdings) Ltd. Companies House records showed that, on 30 January 2024, the shareholders of S.J. Meddle (Holdings) Ltd, and therefore the *beneficial* owners of S.J. Meddle Ltd, were Mr Steven Meddle, Mrs Bonita Meddle and Mr Michael Meddle.

Members were advised that officers had been made aware before the 2025 fishery that one of the shareholders had died. Officers had held discussions with the company regarding the resulting change in beneficial ownership and further discussions had taken place once probate had been granted.

On 10 April 2026, KEIFCA received an application from S.J. Meddle Ltd for authorisation to continue the transitional licence despite a change in the *beneficial* ownership of the company following the death of one of the shareholders of the holding company. Members were advised that the *legal* ownership of S.J. Meddle Ltd was to remain unchanged. The application listed Mr Steven Meddle and Mr Michael Meddle as the only shareholders going forward, with no new shareholders being added.

Members were reminded of the rationale for the transitional arrangements set out in the TECFO 2024 Management Plan, which was intended to allow established companies and vessels to continue operating during the first seven years of the new Order while adapting to the revised legislative framework.

The Deputy Chief Officer reported that the application did not seek to introduce outside investment or new shareholders, and that the shares would move from being split between three existing shareholders to being split between the two remaining existing

shareholders. Officers therefore recommended that the continuation of the transitional licence for S.J. Meddle Ltd be approved.

Members **APPROVED** the continuation of the licence to S.J. Meddle Ltd.

Mrs E Gilson re-joined the meeting.

9. MANILA CLAM TRIAL UPDATE (B6)

Members were presented with an update on the 2026 Manila clam trial and thanked the trialists for their continued effort and collaboration. Members were advised that the two-year trial was designed to assess the effects of fleet-level fishing activity on Manila clam biology, stock levels, economic considerations and enforcement of management arrangements.

Members were informed that survey data collected between autumn 2024 and spring 2025 had identified a substantial decline in Manila clam biomass which could not be fully explained by reported fishing activity alone. Natural processes, including overwinter mortality, were likely to have contributed; however, areas subject to fishing pressure in 2024 appeared to have experienced a greater decline than unfished areas.

It was reported that defined fishing-effort zones had been established in Area 6 for the 2026 trial, with Area 6H designated as the high-effort zone, Area 6L as the low-effort zone and a control area set aside where no fishing activity would take place. Baseline surveys had been completed before the trial began, with follow-up surveys planned to assess changes in stock abundance and biomass.

Members were informed that Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) was used throughout the trial to record vessel position and gear-in-water activity. This enabled officers to assess fishing footprint, catch per unit effort and impacts on clam stocks, cockle stocks and the seabed.

Four trialist vessels took part in the 2026 trial, which ran for seven weeks from 16 March 2026 following the addition of an extension week. The trial areas were split between Area 6H, Area 6L, Area 20 and prospecting areas. Each trialist was allocated 15 trips in total, comprising 11 trips to the trial areas, three prospecting trips and a final trip in either the trial or prospecting areas, excluding Area 6L.

Each vessel had completed one damage-rate assessment during the trial and KEIFCA officers had undertaken five landing inspections to weigh catches and record any undersized catch. Compared with the 2024 trial, most fishing effort was focused in Area 6 rather than Area 20, although not all vessels completed their allocated trips.

Damage-rate samples were collected during boardings by separating retained and discarded catch by species, size and damage level. Members were advised that low

damage rates were important both for the sustainability of discarded stock and for maintaining commercial value in the live market.

During Week 1, trialists were permitted up to two trips each within the trial areas, with a catch limit of 400 kg per trip. Three of the four trialists completed their full allocation and a damage-rate assessment undertaken on Trialist 1 in Area 6H recorded a rate of 3.72%.

During Weeks 2 and 3, trialists were permitted up to four trips each, with a catch limit of 400 kg per trip. Two trialists completed their full allocation, one completed three trips and one completed one trip. Damage-rate assessments undertaken aboard Trialists 2 and 3 in Area 6H recorded rates of 3.12% and 5.77% respectively.

At the end of Week 3, officers took a management decision to close Area 6H to prevent the agreed fishing-effort threshold from being exceeded and to allocate controlled effort to Area 6L. One trip per vessel was permitted in Area 6L to maintain the integrity of the trial design and allow comparison between high-effort, low-effort and control areas following post-trial survey work.

During Weeks 4 and 5, all four trialists completed trips to Area 6L following the closure of Area 6H. After review of the Area 6L trips, Area 6H was reopened during Week 5. Trialist 4 recorded a damage rate of 17.78%; officers had intended to undertake a further assessment, but the vessel did not fish again.

Members were advised that prospecting activity on the Kent side of the prospecting area found good-quality clams, but the ground was considered commercially unviable due to stones and mud boulders being brought up in the tows and lower densities. Prospecting trips later identified good ground on the Maplin Sands.

During Week 6, trialists were permitted to use the week as a contingency period to complete missed trips and prospecting trips. Following review, officers agreed a one-week extension to the trial, running from 0800 hours on Monday 27 April 2026 to 18:00 hours on Friday 1 May 2026. Each vessel was allocated two additional trips at 400 kg per trip, with one trip required in Area 20 and one permitted in any open area; Area 6L remained closed. The trial was successfully completed at 18:00 hours on Friday 1 May 2026.

Members were advised that post-trial questionnaires and feedback sessions would be undertaken with the 2026 trial participants, and that a further update, including feedback and key findings, would be presented at the next Authority meeting.

The Chairman thanked the officer for her very good report and update on the trial and thanked Mr David Ferris for his kind letter addressed to the Authority and presented as appendix 1 to the agenda item in meeting papers.

In response to a question on whether the results of the trial would remain internal to KEIFCA or if they would be sent to Natural England, the Chief Officer responded that once the full report had been written it would be shared with the MPA team at NE.

Members **NOTED** the Manila clam trial update.

10. PERMIT BYELAW COCKLE FISHERY (B7)

Mrs E Gilson left the room.

The Deputy Chief Officer presented the report on the 2026 Permit Byelaw Cockle Fishery and advised Members that, following the introduction of the Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery Order 2024, the boundaries of the permit fishery had changed. Members were informed that areas previously within TECFO, including Scrapsgate, the Spile and Margate Sands, now formed part of the permit fishery and that management would therefore need to consider a wider range of areas across the Thames Estuary.

Members were advised that, unlike in 2025 when the fishery opened earlier due to the delayed opening of the TECFO fishery, officers recommended that the 2026 fishery return to its traditional September/October period. This would allow beds the maximum opportunity for growth and was expected to improve the financial return from the fishery.

The Deputy Chief Officer explained that the proposed management approach continued to encourage the fleet to spread fishing effort across available areas, locate new stocks and make use of smaller beds. Members were informed that officers would review any trips where fishing time in a single area exceeded three hours per vessel, based on an economically viable cockle suction dredging catch rate of approximately one tonne per hour. Officers also recommended that the 350 tonne minimum stock requirement for opening an area be waived for the 2026 fishery, as had been done in the previous three years.

Members were reminded that the Authority was required to notify Natural England of its intention to issue permits to fish for cockles within designated SSSI, SPA and Ramsar intertidal sites and to submit an Appropriate Assessment. Officers advised that the assessment had been discussed informally with Natural England and would be formally submitted following the Authority's decisions on the report.

Members were advised that zonal management of Area 20 was proposed again for 2026 to allow for the Manila clam trial fishery. The Dengie Sand would be closed to cockle dredging and a specified area of the Buxey Sand would also be closed to cockle dredging, while being used as part of the Manila clam trials.

The Deputy Chief Officer reported that spring cockle stock surveys had been completed across the Buxey, Dengie and Ray Sands, Minnis Bay, Margate Sands, Spile and Scrapsgate. Members were informed that Area 13 (Spile) and Area 18 (Margate Sands)

contained good stocks of sizeable cockles, while Area 20 (Buxey) contained good numbers of one-year-old adult cockles, most of which were currently below minimum size. Smaller stocks were also available on Margate Hook, Ray and Scrapsgate.

Members were informed that 34 applications had been received for Category 2 permits, the same number as in 2025. Officers advised that, taking account of the revised fishery boundaries, stock levels, spat levels and exceptional growth observed on Margate Sands, the initial Total Allowable Catch for the fishery was recommended at 816 tonnes. This comprised seven landings south of TECFO and one landing north of TECFO.

The Deputy Chief Officer further advised Members that the Margate Sands had different stock dynamics from other Thames cockle beds, particularly due to rapid growth, and that KEIFCA would therefore take a conservative initial approach to management. Further surveys of Margate Sands and the Spile were planned for the summer, and officers would review industry feedback, officer observations, damage rates and catch rates when considering whether any additional trips or reallocations could be made.

Members were reminded that only Category 2 permits would be issued for the 2026 fishery and that these were limited to a maximum of 3.4m³, approximately three tonnes, per trip. Officers explained that the permit fishery outside TECFO 2024 was intended to provide a small-scale fishing opportunity and that the proposed arrangements sought to balance access for smaller vessels with the need to maintain a sustainable fishery.

Members considered requests from industry for greater flexibility for smaller vessels, including the use of lighter alternative gear and smaller riddles, and requests to allow TAC to be managed on a weekly tonnage basis rather than by a fixed number of trips. Officers advised that exemptions could be developed for the 2026 fishery, subject to conditions including vessel size, non-suction dredge gear where relevant, pre-fishery gear testing, minimum size and damage-rate requirements, Remote Electronic Monitoring, daily landings returns and end-of-fishery feedback.

Members were advised that officers expected all vessels operating in the fishery to have an appropriate Vessel Monitoring System, with REM required for vessels operating outside the usual management arrangements. Permit holders wishing to take up either exemption would be required to write to the Authority by Wednesday 20 June 2026, with the Cockle Officer acting as the lead contact for coordination and gear testing.

The Chairman thanked the Deputy Chief Officer for his report and invited questions:

In response to a question on flexibility if the exemption system didn't work, the Deputy Chief Officer advised that REM allows for flexibility and that the Cockle Officer was a good point of contact for the industry.

A Member pointed out that smaller vessels now had access to a fishery that they would not have had before and questioned whether that could potentially lead to an opportunity

to apply for a cockle licence. The Deputy Chief Officer responded that it would be for the Authority to decide what criteria they would want from licence holders, but that certainly this gave an opportunity to smaller boats that they didn't have before.

A Member questioned the efficiency of an alternative, smaller riddle to not retain undersized cockles. The Chief Officer responded that each permit holder would need to prove that their gear was successfully selective.

The Chief Officer informed Members that it was ambitious to offer so much flexibility in the fishery this year and it would result in a lot of work for Officers testing various different gear types.

The Chairman reflected on the ambitious target Officers had set themselves and congratulated them on the high standards of work.

Members **APPROVED** the 2026 Permit Byelaw Cockle Fishery management measures,

- (a) The Management Plan requirement that any open areas shall contain a minimum of 350 tonnes of cockles shall be waived for the 2026 season, subject to continual review throughout the fishery.
- (b) The Total Allowable Catch (TAC) should be set initially at 816 tonnes and that information related to the stocks will be continually reviewed throughout the season to ensure sustainability.
- (c) Reallocation of TAC, and therefore extension of the fishing season, may be made in the event of any remaining TAC and taking onboard feedback from industry and officers
- (d) That the Chief IFCO be authorised, after consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairman, to implement changes to fishing controls to ensure future sustainability including for the purposes of (b) and (c). These will be communicated to Members following decisions being made.
- (e) That the described zonal management of Area 20 be undertaken in order to provide for a manila clam fishery trial.
- (f) That all areas subject to the permit byelaw shall be opened to fishing subject to the spatial restrictions in area 20 for manila clam trials, and that information related to fishing activity, catch rates and vessel density will be continually reviewed throughout the season to ensure sustainability.
- (g) That the fishery will commence at 18:00 hrs on Sunday 6 September 2026.
- (h) Provisional fishing allocations will be as follows, this will also be subject to further amendment;
- (i) The fishing season will be divided into weekly specified fishing periods which will run from 18:00 hrs on Sunday to 12:00 hrs on Friday and during these periods

permit holders will be permitted to make the following specified numbers of landings.

Dates	Number of weeks	Number of landings per week
6 September – 2 October	4	2 landings of 3.4m ³ or no more than 6.8 m ³ per week (6 bags)

- (j) Permit holders operating small boats may apply for an exemption to explore lighter and smaller gear types and riddles subject to the fitting of a REM system and additional documentation requirements.
- (k) The maximum quantity of cockles that may be landed or carried on board will be 3.39m³/125 baskets per fishing trip (approx. equivalent 3 tonnes) unless a vessel is operating under an exemption related to quantity.

11. DRAFT TECFO 7-YEAR LICENCE APPLICATION SUMMARY DOCUMENT (B8)

Members were reminded that the TECFO (No. 2) Order 2024 Management Plan that accompanied TECFO 2024 outlined the Licence Allocation Process for each 7-year cycle. To assist industry, Officers had worked with the legal team to produce a draft summary document which outlined key sections of the application process.

The Chief Officer informed Members that it was proposed to hold a series of individual meetings for potential licence applicants to meet in person with KEIFCA Officers (Chief Officer, Deputy Chief Officer and Cockle Officer) to ask questions and familiarise themselves with the application process. Individuals or companies that held a permit or a licence over the last 5 years would be contacted directly by KEIFCA to make them aware of the licence application summary document and the opportunity to book a slot with officers.

The Chairman thanked the Chief Officer for the report and invited questions:

A Member suggested that the first paragraph of the draft document be removed, so that it could be used for future iterations.

A Member suggested that the table shown on page 3 of the draft document could be updated to include who was doing what.

The Chief Officer agreed to both suggestions and thanked Members for their feedback.

Members **AGREED** to the Licence application summary document, subject to suggested changes, and the proposed engagement plans with the cockle industry.

Mrs E Gilson re-joined the meeting.

12. BASS AUTHORISATION REPORT WORKSHOPS (B9)

The Authority received an update on work undertaken following the presentation delivered by Hayden Hurst, Principal Compliance & Enforcement Officer, on the Bass Authorisation Review report published in December 2025.

Members were reminded that, following the presentation, the Authority requested that officers engaged with members of the local fishing industry to discuss the key findings of the review, gather feedback, and explore the potential for a drift net trial, as identified under Action 3H of the 2026/27 Annual Plan.

Members were informed that KEIFCA officers had held two industry workshops, on 12 March 2026 in Colchester and 26 March 2026 in Whitstable. Both workshops followed the same format and used an interactive survey platform to gather feedback from participants.

Officers advised that an easy-to-read summary document capturing the key themes and views expressed during the workshops had been produced and circulated to attendees who provided contact details and wished to receive feedback.

Members were informed that KEIFCA officers had worked closely with Eastern IFCA to explore the feasibility of a drift net trial, building on recommendations contained within the Bass Authorisation Review. An initial meeting had been held with the relevant subject lead at Cefas to begin scoping the potential trial. DEFRA had advised that any drift net trial proposal would need to be considered through the Bass Management Group.

The Chief Officer reported that both IFCA's were working towards undertaking a small-scale feasibility trial during autumn 2026, with a larger-scale trial potentially to commence in spring 2027. An application for Industry Science Partnership funding was being considered for the main trial. In the meantime, KEIFCA and Eastern IFCA were exploring options for jointly funding the feasibility phase, with associated costs currently being assessed.

Members were advised that feedback from the industry workshops had been shared with Eastern IFCA and that many of the issues raised by fishers were consistent across both districts. Eastern IFCA had taken the lead on preparing a literature review of drift netting, as required by the Bass Authorisation Review, and was co-ordinating the information required to support a future funding bid. The intention was to have the necessary information available for consideration at the next Bass Management Group meeting.

The Chairman thanked the Officers and invited questions. Comments included:

- Delays in negotiations with the EU could be unpalatable to both the commercial and recreational sectors.
- Could this potentially be a danger to navigation?
- Officers from MMO Eastern and MMO North Eastern have had conversations with Defra and would be very supportive of drift netting trial

Members **NOTED** the Bass FMP Authorisations Review: *Inshore fishing industry workshop summary* and **AGREED** to officers scoping out and taking steps to develop and further a drift net trial with Eastern IFCA.

13. HEALTH & SAFETY ANNUAL REVIEW 2025/26 (B10)

The Deputy Chief Officer reported that he and the Office Manager had met on two occasions during the year to formally review health and safety matters.

Members were advised that one health and safety incident had occurred since the previous annual report. On 17 March 2026, during RIB capsizing training at the Maritime College, Gravesend, two members of staff sustained minor head injuries while entering an overturned RIB as part of a training exercise. Both individuals were wearing the appropriate PPE and received immediate treatment in accordance with the training provider's health and safety procedures. In line with the Authority's policy relating to head injuries, both members of staff attended hospital/minor injuries services for precautionary checks. No concussion or other injuries were identified and both staff members returned to work the following day.

The incident was subsequently investigated by the DCFO and Office Manager. The investigation concluded that the training provider had not provided sufficiently clear instructions regarding entry into the overturned vessel. It was further concluded that staff had followed the appropriate procedures and that no further action was required.

It was reported to Members that all risk assessments continued to be reviewed annually, or sooner where required. Defibrillators remained operational on board the patrol vessels *Tamesis* and *Nerissa*, having been installed in August 2018. Members also noted that defibrillators had been installed at the Ramsgate and Brightlingsea offices in July 2024.

The Chairman thanked the Deputy Chief Officer for his report and invited questions:

The Vice Chairman commented that incidents resulting in a head injury should be reported to the Chairman & Vice Chairman. The Deputy Chief Officer advised that he would update Incident Reporting to state that Chairman & Vice Chairman to be notified of head injuries.

Members **NOTED** the Health & Safety Annual Review 2025/26

14. TERMS OF REFERENCE AND STANDING ORDERS (B12)

The Clerk reminded Members that the Authority adopted its current Standing Orders and Code of Conduct at the May Quarterly meeting in 2025 and that these documents were required to be reviewed annually.

The Clerk advised Members that proposed minor changes to the Code of Conduct, regarding the register of personal interests, would apply only to the MMO appointed Members:

- Amend section 5's title from "Disclosure of personal interests" to "Disclosure of personal interests at meetings" (page 19).
- Add into section 8 (registration of members' interests) a new sentence that reads "A register of non-Elected Board Members' interests will be published on the KEIFCA website." (page 8). The publication of a register of interests is to keep in line with best practice.

The Clerk informed Members that the Association of Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (AIFCA) had commissioned Your Clerk LLP to develop national guidance on declaration of interests for IFCA members. Your Clerk LLP had held meetings with the Clerks to the IFCAs to discuss current practice and based on the outcome of this work, they would issue best practice guidance. KEIFCA's Standing Orders may be amended in light of these recommendations, and Members will be kept updated on the progress of this.

Members **APPROVED** the changes to the Terms of Reference and Standing Orders as described within the report, and **NOTED** the work of the AIFCA in developing guidance on declarations of interest for Members.

The Chairman and Vice Chairman left the room.

The Clerk reminded Members that at the January 2026 Quarterly meeting, they amended the Standing Orders to reflect the payment of allowances to the Chairman and Vice Chairman. These payments were made in recognition of the additional commitment required for their roles and should be reviewed annually as part of the review of the Standing Orders. Members were told that there was no proposal to change the amounts paid to the Chairman and Vice Chairman at £5,000pa and £3,000pa respectively.

A Member commented that as the allowances had not been changed since 2011, she would consider an increase appropriate. Other Members agreed and the Chief Officer advised that Officers would prepare some options to be presented at a future meeting.

Members **APPROVED** the following:

- i) the recommendation to pay £5,000pa to the Chairman and £3,000pa to the Vice Chairman for 2026/2027; and
- ii) that a review of the Chairman's and Vice Chairman's allowances be undertaken.

The Chairman and Vice Chairman re-joined the meeting.

15. VESSEL UPDATE (B11)

The Deputy Chief Officer updated Members on the build progress of RIB Nereus and reported that he had attended the boatyard the week before the meeting. Members were informed that the life raft had been sent for powder coating and that the vessel was on schedule to be ready in a few weeks' time.

There was a discussion on the repeated and lengthy delays and Members expressed disappointment that Nereus had still not been delivered. The Deputy Chief Officer echoed Members' frustration and stated that he was confident KEIFCA would have Nereus within a few weeks.

Members received:

- Quarterly Report of the Kent IFCO (C1)
- Quarterly Report of the Essex IFCO (C2)
- Quarterly Report of the Patrol Vessel 'Tamesis' and 'Vigilant'(C3)
- Quarterly Report of the Patrol Vessel 'Nerissa' (C4)
- Recreational Angling Report (C5)
- Enforcement Report (C6)

13:07 Meeting ended