

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

MINUTES of an exempt meeting of the Authority held in the Marconi Room, Chelmsford BC council offices, Duke Street, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 1JE on Tuesday 25 November 2025 at 10am.

Present: Mr J Lamb (MMO), Mr J Nichols (MMO), Mr P Wexham (MMO), Mr W East (MMO), Mr C Collins (MMO), Mrs E Gilson (MMO), Mr J Rowley (MMO), Mr A Baker (NE), Mr R Turner (MMO), Cllr M Skeels (ECC), Cllr J Finch (KCC), Cllr M Lawes (KCC), Cllr J Henderson (KCC), Cllr C Mulroney (Southend Council), Cllr J Fleming (ECC), Cllr A Goggin (ECC)

Apologies: Cllr S Curry (Medway Council), Ms T Ferry (MMO), Cllr G Coxshall (Thurrock Council), Mr E Hannam (MMO)

In Attendance: Mr J Cook (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), Mrs D O'Shea (Office Manager)

By invitation: Ms S Fox (Southend on Sea CC)

### **24. DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS (A1)**

The Chairman requested Members to 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 Gilson declared a personal interest in Agenda item B2

### **25. MINUTES OF 6 AUGUST 2025 (A2)**

Members agreed that the minutes of the meetings held on 6 August 2025 were correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman. No matters were arising.

10:15 Mr Collins arrived

### **26. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2025/2026 (B1)**

The financial advisor to the IFCA provided Members with a budget forecast and actual expenditure based on the account transactions up to 31 October 2025 with a projected overspend of £36,890.

Members were provided within their papers details of the main budget lines which had been overspent and were advised that an amount of £62,300 of these costs would be funded or partially funded by the Fisheries Management Plans/MPA grants from DEFRA.

10:20 Mr East arrived

Members made the following comments:

- Following agreement of the budget in January and the details of the levy provided to the Local Authorities, does the IFCA at any point notify the relevant Local Authorities of the budget monitoring that takes place and details of any overspend – in response the Financial Advisor informed Members that this was not something that was required from the IFCA. All papers and details of budget monitoring were available on the website as a public document which Members could share with their Local Authority if they wished to. She only spoke to the Local Authorities at the time of budget setting and, if asked, provided details of the IFCA's 5-year plan with regard to budgets.
- KCC provided a substantial amount to the IFCA. Why did KCC not receive a monthly statement - in response the Clerk stated that the relevant Local Authorities were responsible for providing the levy. The IFCA's responsibility was to determine and manage that budget and make appropriate decisions on how the money the Local Authorities made available was spent. It was not for the Local Authorities to dictate how the detail of the budget was managed, that was the responsibility of the members of the IFCA. The Chairman confirmed that it was for the LA representatives to share those papers with their Local Authorities if they needed to.
- Budget spend was reported at each meeting. Members looked at the information provided and could challenge if there were any issues. Otherwise, it was to monitor only. There was open transparency in respect of the IFCA's finances.
- Why were interest payments received from KCC – the Financial Advisor stated that KCC held and invested the IFCA's levy payments and reserves and passed on any interest that they accrued back to the IFCA.

Members **NOTED** the report and **APPROVED** the forecast overspend of £36,890

## **27. 2025 COCKLE FISHERY MANAGEMENT (B2)**

The DCFO reminded Members that this year's cockle fishery was the first to open under the new Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery (No. 2) Order 2024 (TECFO). Changes to the TECFO fishery included an additional licence, spatial and temporal changes. The TECFO fishery boundaries had been altered from that of TECFO 1994 and the delay in the opening of the fishery saw TECFO landings continue up until the end of the approved Habitats Regulations Assessments period. The fishery had run from 17 August 2025 to 31 October 2025 with a Total Allowable Catch (TAC) of 5,940 tonnes which allowed 33 trips per vessel.

Members were informed that the fishery had started later than usual and that the yield had not been as good as was usually seen although this did improve towards the end of

the season. From a stock management perspective there were large quantities of spat found when surveying throughout the main beds which if they were to survive the winter would reach adult size in two years.

The Permitted Cockle Fishery had started earlier this year, before the opening of the TECFO fishery and included additional beds. This fishery ran from 13 July to 8 August 2025 with a TAC of 612 tonnes. From 34 permit applications, 23 vessels fished. The earlier start in the year had implications on the size of the cockles, in particular on the Margate sands, as summer was their growing period and as a result of the early opening the percentage yields were lower than previous years. However, the medium term outlook was looking positive as officers were seeing a slow increase in the amount of adult stock. The intention for 2026 was that this fishery would open as usual in September/October 2026.

The Autumn cockle surveys had taken place in September 2025. There was a slight reduction in adult stock compared to the 2024 survey, however spat was relatively high and at a level to suggest the cockle population was relatively stable.

Members asked the following questions:

- Prior to the introduction of licencing was this a flourishing industry – in response the DCFO stated that licencing was introduced in 1994. Prior to that the beds had been worked for about four generations. However, if licencing had not been introduced then the fishery would not have continued to be sustainable. The licence holders now fished the stocks at the best time of year to achieve the best income and had also now achieved MSC accreditation.
- Had there been an increase in the number of licences issued abroad and was there anyone from outside the UK coming into UK waters – in response the DCFO stated that all licences were issued to UK companies who paid UK taxes.
- Had the new technology been of use in the fishery – in response the DCFO stated that officers had worked with the industry to install and use REM in the fishery which had given the IFCA the ability to monitor fishing activity remotely. This allowed officers to gather best evidence should an offence be committed and to show when and when grounds had been fished for management purposes.

11:00 Cllr Fleming leaves the meeting

- Had the Permit fishery benefited the smaller vessels – in response the CFO advised that it had. It had been challenging for the fishermen to get the right sized boat as it required heavy gear to fish for cockles. Some operators only wanted to land small amounts and it ultimately came down to economics, the catch rate and value of stock. The Margate sands had made it more economic for them to fish.

- Had there been a reduction in what could be caught by fishermen in the TECFO fishery – in response the DCFO stated that the number of trips prior to 2011 had been higher than they were now. The catches per day were the same, although the number of trips varied year by year and were cyclical. The overall value of the fishery sat at £7million per year.

Members **NOTED** and **APPROVED** the report

## **28. SMALL SCALE MANILA CLAM TRIAL UPDATE (B3)**

The CFO reminded Members that at their last meeting they had agreed a two-year trial to run from November to the second week of December 2025. Officers had agreed the Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) with Natural England and had obtained an agreement with the Food Standards Association (FSA), CEFAS and the local county council authorities (primarily London Port Health Authority) to transfer the shellfish classifications awarded to cockles over to Manila clams.

The two main areas fished as well as a control area adjacent to them had been surveyed in October prior to the beginning of the fishery. Initial results from the surveys showed a drop in the Manila clam populations compared to 2023 and 2024, and whilst both the Buxey and the Foulness beds still had significant numbers of Manila clams, the survey showed that the majority of above legal minimum size clams were in the Foulness area. Members were advised that it was unusual to find this type of fishery in this area which made it important for the IFCA to understand the impact of any fishing by having accurate tracking and landing data. Officers had worked with the five trialists to make sure Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) units have been installed and biosecurity and gear inspections had been passed. All the trialists taking part used water-injection batch dredges.

The trial fishery opened as planned on 3 November 2025. During Week 1, a total of five trips were undertaken between four of the trialist vessels and all trialists were contacted after Week 1 to gather feedback on the main trial areas. In Weeks 2–3, trialists had been permitted to make up to four trips over the two-week period. However, poor weather conditions and market prices at the start of Week 2 prevented vessels from fishing as planned.

On 14 November 2025, KEIFCA set up a meeting with the manila clam trialists following concerns about current market and stock availability. Feedback was received on the condition of the grounds and stock levels. There was a noticeable reduction in stock across both beds. Current market conditions in the UK and export markets were saturated, with prices of manila clam falling to around half the price achieved in the 2024 trial. The general view was that a spring fishery would be more viable, particularly as this was when the UK market was not saturated by the Solent and Poole fisheries. Officers met again with the trialists on 21 November and it was agreed to pause the trial

and to run it in the Spring as there would be a gap in supply as the other fisheries would have ended. An update would be provided to Members at the January meeting.

11:20 Cllr Fleming returned

Members asked the following questions:

- Agree with the decision to pause the process. The triallists were competing with people taking clams off the shores and selling them onto restaurants illegally. Until this problem is resolved then we will see this is a problem. There needed to be some control – in response Ms Fox advised that restaurants could purchase illegally but ran the risk of a substantial fine. All Local Authorities checked to ensure that restaurants had the appropriate documentation if inspected. If they had no documentation, then both the restaurateur and the premises committed an offence in purchasing. The DCFO also clarified that prices for clams had been affected by the Poole Harbour and Solent fisheries flooding the market, not illegal harvesting.

Members **NOTED** the report

## **29. FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PLANS (FMP) (B4)**

The CFO provided Members with an overview of the development of Defra's FMPs. Since December 2023, six had been published with five due to be published by the end of 2025 and the final four in 2026. The five due to be published this year related to fisheries within the District including cockles and skates and rays and would provide the IFCA with a clear idea of the objectives and key deliveries required for those fish stocks. KEIFCA had led on progression of the Whelk FMP and the lead enforcement officer had sat on a bass authorisations task and finish group.

Members asked the following questions:

- Is there likely to be an increase or decrease in the size of bass able to be landed. A number of anglers were in favour of having a range at which fish could be landed with a lot of favour of 40mm to 45mm fish. All the big fish were being taken leaving nothing in the big breeding stock – in response the CFO advised that there was a blog on DEFRA's website which provided the minutes of all the meetings. A subgroup had been created to evaluate the species minimum size and it looked as though bass stocks were increasing. The feedback appeared to be that the commercial sector and anglers wanted different management. The CFO was aware that a more detailed ICES assessment had been undertaken. Once the FMP was published then it would be brought before Members.

- Had the water temperature this year affected the whelks, had there been any die back – in response the PSCO stated that 2025 had had some very warm spells but they had been sporadic and not sustained as they had been in 2021. No incidences had been reported.
- Sustainability was important but not to the detriment of the fishing industry. How much were the French fishing boats monitored when they came into our waters and how much environmental surveying was being done on the impacts of windfarms and cables on our fishing boats. Folkestone had just lost its last full time fishing boat which was a sad reflection on all that had gone on. Was the effect on the towns and fishermen taken into account when deciding on these plans – the CFO stated that it was accepted there was a reduction in fin fish being landed. The new FMPs took a different approach in involving the community in their creation. Newcastle University with Dr Sarah Coulthard was looking at a project which took into account not just the fishing aspect but also a wider societal aspect in supporting the inshore fleet. Mr Rowley advised that the MMO had two large ships that monitored the 6-12nm sea area. Any foreign vessel that came into this area would be required to be licenced to allow them to fish. They would not be allowed to fish within the 6nm limit.

Members **NOTED** the report

*Presentation by Sheira Fox, Regulatory Services Manager at Southend City Council on the work of Environmental Health in relation to illegal shellfish harvesting.*

Ms Fox advised Members that Southend had an established shellfish industry, primarily that of cockle processing. Southend had 7 miles of seafront which were part of a SSSI with shellfish beds readily accessible at low water. Commercial hand harvesting did take place in this area, controlled by the LA and focused mainly on Gigas/Pacific/Rock Oysters although other species on production beds were also hand harvested. These production beds were classified for specific shellfish with these classifications having legal requirements associated with them before they could be placed on the market for human consumption.

May to September appeared to be the season for illegal harvesting activities. The number of incidences had begun to reduce but in 2025 had increased. In 2025 her team, which consisted of 5 people, had seized 1.5 tonnes of shellfish. Five formal seizures (through the courts) and five voluntary surrenders had taken place with multiple consignments abandoned. It was permissible for the public to harvest shellfish for their own consumption. Under 5kg would be accepted for personal use but her team would look to establish the quantity taken, degree of organisation and potential risk to profit when considering if the activity was illegal.

Intelligence was shared with a number of outside agencies including KEIFCA and joint operations were carried out during the main season with these partners. EHOs had the

power to seize tools used in carrying out the illegal harvesting, search vehicles and could apply for recovery of costs for destruction of seized shellfish from the harvester.

Members asked the following questions:

- Are you able to use a drone – in response Ms Fox stated that they were waiting to hear from Southend Airport whether they would be able to use one. It was something they would find useful.
- Had you considered using a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) – Ms Fox advised that she had been told it was not appropriate to use this as it had to be used to tackle anti-social behaviour and that controls were already in place under food safety legislation.

The Chairman thanked Ms Fox for her presentation

The Chairman invited Mr Graham West to address Members:

Mr West introduced himself to Members as both a commercial fisherman and angler. His concern was over the illegal harvesting of shellfish. Very little was now left for recreational anglers to harvest for bait because of this with violence against bait diggers challenging this behaviour increasing. He asked that the IFCA consider putting a byelaw in place that specifies a specific amount of personal usage for each species.

Members made the following comments:

- Sussex IFCA now issued permits for collection of bait at a cost of £75, however there was no control over who could have them. They were being trialled but unless the requirement to have one was tightened up, they were useless.
- Would it be possible to raise with Defra to see if there were limits that could be set.

The Chairman invited Mr Andy Riches to address Members:

Mr Riches spoke to Members about the legislation that was due to come into force in the new year on the welfare of crustaceans which would specify what was and wasn't a legal way to kill crab and lobsters. Boiling lobsters from live would become illegal, even if previously frozen. He commented that KEIFCA had promoted the selling of fish and shellfish direct to the public through Fish Local. He supported and endorsed this initiative and had benefited from it. Defra had suggested four alternatives:

- Purchase of a stunning mechanism at a possible cost of between £2.7k to £4k
- Kill mechanically using a pointed screwdriver or knitting needle which was not an ideal way to contain the meat content
- Public should stop buying shellfish or use imported products
- Public should stop buying live shellfish altogether

Mr Riches suggested that the last two options were badly thought out. He asked whether the IFCA would be expected to enforce this legislation or be part of the process of overseeing it and whether the IFCA had received any advice on how to do this.

### **30. STRATEGIC VESSEL UPDATE (B5)**

Members were informed that the legislation governing the construction and fit of Tamesis and Nerissa had changed and as a result both vessels were required to conform to tighter regulations. Currently most IFCA vessels were operating under Workboat Code 2 and would now need to transition to Workboat Code 3. In order to comply Nerissa and Tamesis required refit works and the vessel management and auditing system needed to be updated.

Gap analysis had been undertaken by marine surveyors to establish what remedial work was required on both vessels. Nerissa was constructed with flexible hoses throughout the vessel including through the machinery spaces, which were required to be replaced almost completely with solid pipe. The scale of the works required to code Nerissa under Workboat Code 3 were significant, with approximately 250 metres of various size hose requiring replacement with solid pipe. These works required significant disruption of the vessel, not least of which was part of the deck requiring removal to allow the hydraulic tank to be removed for inspection and installation of these solid pipes. Other work was also required, some were the buying in of a replacement of upgraded part or piece of equipment to meet new or amended rules, but there were also some changes in the way of working, logging and reporting on how the vessel operated.

To undertake these works officers had attempted to obtain quotations from several yards, however only Diverse Marine based on the Isle of Wight and who had worked on Nerissa in the past came back with the required information. The vessel is currently scheduled to transit to Diverse in late November with works expected to be completed by January. The vessel would be brought fully up to Workboat Code 3 specification and would be surveyed and signed off accordingly by the Surveyor.

Some additional jobs would be attended to at the same time, including inspection of all and replacement of at least two seaward valves, looking into the best options to tackle and monitor electrolysis in and around the vessel and the installation of the newly acquired steering rams whilst the hose and lines are being attended to.

Expected expenditure for the works required aboard Nerissa was approximately £65,000.

Funds for this would be taken from the capital reserves as detailed in Agenda item B1.

Tamesis had the same issues with hoses as Nerissa and would also require replacements. Work was currently underway to obtain a schedule of costs and identify suitable boatyards to carry out these works. Anticipated expenditure was £30,000 to £50,000 with the funds to be taken from capital reserves.

The new RIB, Nemo had experienced delays in her build and had originally been due for delivery in May 2024. Officers had met with the boatyard and expressed their concerns. Ribcraft had been set letters setting out the position of the IFCA and have now provided



the 23 January 2026 as a date for delivery. Nemo was being built to Workboat Code 3 standards and the build was being overseen by the IFCA's surveyors.

Members asked the following questions:

- Would the additional spend impact the budget – in response the DCFO advised that the cost of the refit would come from reserves and so would not impact the budget
- Only one quote had been provided for Nerissa's refit and no details provided for other yards - in response the DCFO advised that Nerissa was a unique build and was wider than a standard vessel with her aft deck cut out. This extra width meant that there was nowhere within the District that she could be lifted out. When planning her build, Ramsgate harbour was due to replace the lift it used with one that would have been capable of lifting Nerissa from the harbour. This did not happen and the IFCA were now far more limited in yards that could take her. She was also known to boatyards as a complicated vessel. Diverse had worked on her before and knew her well.
- What was the expected lifetime of Nerissa – in response the DCFO advised that she was currently ten years old. With the refit that should extend her life by five to ten years. These vessels were expensive to maintain, but the cost of replacing her would be £2.5million
- Is the boat that Nemo is replacing being sold – in response the DCFO advised that Vigilant would be transferred to Ramsgate and work out of there on a trial basis for a year when the decision to keep her or not would be reassessed.
- There were a lot of boats for a very small team. Were the works a necessity – in response the DCFO stated that the refit was a legal requirement.

Members **NOTED** the report

### **31. UPDATE ON PHD PROJECT (B6)**

At their previous meeting Members had approved a research partnership with the University of Essex and the Fishmongers' Company to co-fund a PhD project to better understand how key shellfish species would respond to warming seas. The title of this project would be "Shellfish fisheries under pressure from increasing frequency and intensity of marine heatwaves".

It was expected that the PhD would begin in January 2026 and follow a typical PhD structure of three to four years. Field work and sample collection would be carried out in close collaboration with local fishers to ensure that samples were collected at the right time of year. Positive feedback had been received from SAGB in respect of this project.

The recruitment phase had begun with the hope that the PhD candidate would start in January 2026. Failing successful recruitment on the first attempt the University would re-advertise in January and start in September 2026.

Members asked the following questions/made comments:

- Supported this project and very excited to see the outcomes
- How much was the cost of the PhD, who was bearing the cost and would the student be based in Essex – in response the CFO stated that £40k had been allocated from Defra funding and Fishmongers Hall was also funding £40k. The remainder would be borne by Essex University. With regard to where the student would be based, that would probably be near the University as they would be expected to carry out laboratory experiments.
- Who owns the data and was there any value in it – in response the PSCO advised that it would be owned by the University and the IFCA. With regard to the value. That was unclear at this stage. The contract would control how the IP was leveraged but that was part of the University's remit.
- Would it be possible to include local fishermen and people in the terms of reference, not just the conservation element. The local economy was important

Members **NOTED** the report

### **32. ANNUAL REPORT (B7)**

The DCFO informed Members that the IFCA was required to provide a report each year setting out the main achievements of the Authority. Members had been emailed out the report and were asked to comment on the content.

Members **APPROVED** the Annual Report subject to any further comment. Finalisation and sending of the report to the Secretary of State would be delegated to the CFO

### **33. MATTERS FOR REPORT (C1-C6)**

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)

13:20 Meeting ended