

Kent & Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

MINUTES of a meeting of the Authority held in the Marconi Room, Chelmsford BC council offices, Duke Street, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 1JE on Tuesday 27 January 2026 at 10am.

Present: Mr J Nichols (MMO), Mr P Wexham (MMO), Mr W East (MMO), Mrs E Gilson (MMO), Mr J Rowley (MMO), Cllr M Skeels (ECC), Cllr J Finch (KCC), Cllr C Mulroney (Southend Council), Cllr A Goggin (ECC), Mr E Hannam (MMO)

Apologies: Mr J Lamb (MMO), Cllr S Curry (Medway Council), Ms T Ferry (MMO), Cllr G Coxshall (Thurrock Council), Mr R Turner (MMO), Cllr M Lawes (KCC), Cllr T Prater (KCC), Cllr J Fleming (ECC), Mr C Collins (MMO)

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), Mrs D O'Shea (Office Manager), Mr H Hurst (Principal Compliance Officer), Miss E Wyatt (IFCO), Miss L West (SCO), Mrs K Woods (Admin Officer)

Laid around the table: Amended Agenda item B1 and Appendix 1 – emailed to Members on 22 January 2026

The Vice Chairman advised Members that the Chairman, Mr John Lamb, was unable to attend due to ill health. Members and officers wished him a speedy recovery.

Members were advised that the clerk to the IFCA, Mr Joel Cook, had stepped down and would be replaced by Mrs Kay Goldsmith. The Vice Chairman thanked Mr Cook on behalf of Members for the advice and guidance that he had provided to the IFCA during his time as Clerk.

34. 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.

35. MINUTES OF 25 NOVEMBER 2026 (A2)

Members agreed that the minutes of the meetings held on 25 November 2025 were correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Vice Chairman. No matters were arising.

36. 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 £16,560. The Financial Advisor informed Members that since the last meeting when an overspend position of £36,890 had been reported, staff had reviewed their expenditure forecasts leading to a reduction of the overspend position. Some of this related to examining the items that had been forward forecast and would no longer be required in this financial year, some of it by identifying and updating the forecast for work that could be funded by the FMP/MPA grants. Members were provided within their papers details of the main budget lines which had been overspent, how the overspend variances had changed and were advised that an amount of £118,483.37 of these costs would be funded or partially funded by the Fisheries Management Plans/MPA grants from DEFRA.

Members **NOTED** the report and **APPROVED** the forecast overspend of £16,560

37. DRAFT BUDGET 2026/2027 (B2)

Members were advised that the budget and expected income and expenditure for the coming year had been reviewed and the proposed budget was £1,059,524 which would result in an overall increase to the levy of 3%, or £30,860. The contributing Authorities would continue to receive the Area Specific Grant from Defra to then pass onto the IFCA. The areas of expected increase or saving were summarised within the report and the appendix which accompanied the report showed both the 2025/26 and the proposed 2026/27 budget line by line increases and savings.

In order to keep expenditure down and following a review of reserves, it was planned that expenditure on training and on GIS software would be funded from ringfenced reserves rather than from the levy.

The contribution to the Renewal reserve for vessels continued to be set at £90,000 as required by Members.

The Financial Advisor reminded Members that at budget setting time, she had communication with finance staff in the constituent Local Authorities about the levy increases. At this stage none had indicated any issues with the proposed levy for their Local Authority.

Members **AGREED** the draft budget of £1,059,524 and the total levy payable by each Local Authority for 2026/2027 as follows:

Thurrock	£40,157
Medway	£79,994
Essex	£456,866
Kent	£456,866
Southend	£25,641

38. TECFO 2024 COCKLE FISHERY (B3)

Members were informed that the fishery had opened later than normal last year from 17 August to 31 October. Fifteen licences were issued and that number would not be reviewed until 2032. The licence holders had to renew their licences by the 31 December each year. Application forms for the renewal of licences had been sent to licence holders on 26 November.

Members were reminded that the number of licences had increased by one and because of this work would begin to collect evidence to assess the impact of that additional licence from both an environmental and socio-economic perspective. Proposals on how this would be achieved would be brought to the May IFCA meeting.

Industry had asked for help to better understand how to prepare for the next licensing round. Officers would put together a draft summary document to give that assistance which would be brought to the May IFCA meeting for Members to approve, following which they would meet with the industry to ensure future applicants were aware of the new system and scoring criteria.

The DCFO advised Members that the licence fee charged for the cockle fishery covered the cost of running and the set-up of the fishery. In respect of the licence fee for the 2026 fishery it was proposed that the fee increase from £10,885 to £11,299 subject to approval of Members and then ministerial consent from the Secretary of State.

Members asked the following questions:

- What information was held from historic surveys in relation to biodiversity - the DCFO stated that cockle survey data was held back to 1991, however at that time it was purely focused on cockles. From 2018 onwards data had been collected on manila clams and this was now included as part of every survey as well as anything of note. Officers did report anecdotally on any changes that they saw. Some changes had been seen across the beds but they were not consistent, however the areas were a lot more diverse than they had been twenty years ago especially in Area 6 and the Southend shores.

- Local fishermen were facing pressure. If at all possible, any increase should be kept to a minimum. Did other IFCA's do anything similar with their fees – in response the DCFO stated that all IFCA's were permitted to recover full costs of administering their fisheries through charging for permits or licences. In respect of the TECFO fishery the licence fee was discussed as part of the review process and the initial fee was set in the Regulating Order and consulted on.

Members **AGREED** that, subject to the consent of the Secretary of State, that the increase of the TECFO 2024 licence fee be increased to £11,299

39. FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE (B4)

Member received a presentation from the Principal Compliance and Enforcement officer on the Defra report reviewing Bass Authorisations

Members were advised that seabass continued to be regarded as the most important finfish species in the KEIFCA district. It was economically significant to the inshore fleet, highly popular with recreational anglers, and played an important ecological role as both predator and prey. Bass stocks were reported to be showing promising signs of recovery, particularly in the East and Southeast.

The Bass Fisheries Management Plan had been published in December 2023, and nine key goals were highlighted - sustainability, equitable access, minimising discarding, ensuring compliance, supporting coastal communities, protecting juvenile and spawning bass, safeguarding the ecosystem, and adapting to climate change.

Members were informed that commercial bass fishing was currently managed through an authorisations system which issued authorisations only to vessels with a track record of landings between 2015–2016. The main gear categories were hook and line (targeted), fixed gillnets (bycatch only), and demersal trawls/seines (percentage bycatch only). These measures were originally introduced as emergency EU regulations and had not been reviewed since implementation.

The bass authorisation system had been reviewed and 24 recommendations produced. The FMP process allowed KEIFCA to submit comments and feedback on the findings. It was reported that the current system only issued authorisations based on historic track records and offered no alternative path for new entrants.

Recommendations 1–4 proposed:

- Amending the track record system to expand fishing opportunity
- Retaining existing authorisations while enabling new entrants
- Capping overall numbers at the historic maximum of 1,186
- Developing a young persons/new fisher scheme
- Creating a pool of authorisations for alternative gear trials

The intended benefits included increased opportunity for inshore fishers, encouraging sustainable methods such as hook and line, and improving data collection.

Recommendation 5 proposed a highly monitored, regionally focused drift netting trial, potentially incorporating Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) or onboard observers. Drift nets were currently prohibited for bass fishing, however fishermen from the East and South East had shown strong support for a limited scientific trial.

The anticipated benefits included:

- Evidence collection on small scale drift netting
- Early adoption of REM
- Assessment of seal related predation reduction

Recommendation 16 proposed reviewing the February to March closure period and potentially adopting regionally specific measures due to concerns regarding regional variety of spawning periods of bass.

11.00 Mr W East left the meeting

Members made the following comments:

- Did the IFCA have the resources to finance a bass drift net trial – in response the CFO stated that Eastern IFCA wanted to undertake a trial and he was aware that a group of fishermen in the north of the District were keen to take part. He saw the review as important and for that reason had included it in the Annual Plan. The intention was to engage with local fishermen to see what the level of support for it was and then to feed back into the Bass Management Group. The IFCA could also write to Defra to advise them what they felt was important to focus on in particular supporting young and new fishermen, drift netting, regional fishing and closed seasons. The CFO advised that it was intended to hold a short workshop in both Kent and Essex to gather expressions of interest from Industry
- This was an exciting piece of work and a long overdue review. Discards should be factored in as a lot of high value species were thrown back.
- The MMO had expressed support for this and thought the letter to Defra was excellent. The East of England were supportive although there was resistance elsewhere; an issue was the concern over birds being caught as a bycatch, however there was very little evidence that this was the case. Considered it a great step forward.

Members **NOTED** the report

40. WHELK PERMIT BYELAW UPDATE (B5)

The Principal Scientific officer provided Members with an overview of the whelk fisheries market in 2025. Most whelks that had been landed in KEIFCA waters had been sold to either Lynn Shellfish Ltd or Chapmans of Rye. Prices were around £1,600 per tonne. MMO data showed landings had increased from 2023 and 2024, although they were not at the level seen in the years prior to that.

The PSO informed Members that nineteen permits had been issued in 2025 to fish within the district and provided details of the breakdown of areas fished. Whelk fishing effort and landings were consistent with the previous two years with the majority of whelks landed in areas 2 and 4. Fishing effort had increased in area 3 with very few catches reported in area 1. All data suggested that the stock levels were relatively stable and that therefore the current management was supporting a sustainable whelk fishery. In order to check compliance with the byelaw officers had boarded fishing boats and carried out gear hauling inspections at sea as well as landing inspections on shore. Nine offences were detected, four were minor infringements and the others dealt with by way of offence notices or financial penalties.

Members were advised that a PhD student had been successfully recruited and had started on 12 January 2026. The PhD would provide important information necessary for better understanding the future of the whelk fishery in the Thames Estuary.

Members **AGREED** that the pot limit, the riddle size and the number and size of escape holes should remain set at:

Pots – 300 for category 1 permits and 10 for category 2 permits

Riddle – 25mm spacing between bars

Escape holes – 10 @ 25mm per pot

41. MANILA CLAM TRIAL OVERVIEW (B6)

Members were reminded that at their last meeting a decision had been made to pause the 2025 Manila Clam trial due to concerns over market conditions. It was proposed that the trial began again in the Spring to allow the trialists to take advantage of the Easter market. The trial would run over six weeks following pre fishery surveys which were due to begin on 5 March.

The Manila clam trial areas would be split into high, medium and no intensity fishing areas to help to assess how clam stocks responded to commercial levels of fishing. Pre and post-trial surveys were planned to enable comparison of stock and ground impacts which had been supported by trialists.

Three prospecting trips would be permitted to allow vessels to explore new grounds,

provided those areas held valid shellfish classifications. Prospecting would not be allowed in prohibited bottom-towed gear areas, and a designated seabed zone would remain closed to protect stock and MPA conservation objectives.

The Food Standards Agency, CEFAS, and local authorities had previously agreed to extend cockle classifications to Manila clams, and KEIFCA aimed to renew these agreements for 2026.

Final limits would be based on the March survey results with provisional limits as follows:

- Weeks 1–3: 400 kg per trip
- Weeks 4–6: 500 kg per trip, subject to review
- Prospecting trips: 300 kg, 300 kg, and 400 kg respectively

All five 2025 trialists had successfully installed REM systems. Data received was high-quality, particularly in capturing gear-in-water activity and these systems would continue to be mandatory in 2026.

Officers reported that the previously agreed bar-spacing study had been completed, with preliminary recommendations of 21 mm or 22 mm spacing with further field-based studies to be carried out during the 2026 trial. Trialists had raised no objections to continuing the experiment. In 2025, mixed landing methods highlighted the need for standardisation. As a result, landing data collected across the two-year trial would also support development of a standard conversion method for box or bag landings.

Members were informed that a full report on the 2026 trial would be presented at the next quarterly meeting at which time they would make a decision on whether to continue the trial into 2027.

Members asked the following questions:

- What gear would the trialists be using – in response the CFO advised that the trialists were starting the fishery using their own gear. The riddle experiment would be used to standardise how the gear was used at sea. It was necessary to understand how the gear worked on the ground that had been fished in 2024. Industry did not mind being asked to use a particular gear type but did not want to have to keep changing it. The Annual Plan would look at the longer-term population. Fishers in the trial were very proactive and wanted it to work. They were very capable fishers who could quickly adapt what they were doing.
- When would the report come back to the IFCA – in response the CFO stated that Members would receive an update in May and a full report in September.

Members **APPROVED**:

- i. the updated 2-year trial outline; and
- ii. that the Chief IFCO, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, to implement changes to fishing controls where necessary for sustainability and TAC setting. Members would be notified of any such decisions

42. VESSEL UPDATE (B7)

Members were informed that Nerissa had been moved to the Diverse Marine boatyard on the Isle of Wight on 11 December 2025. Work had commenced, including examination of the hydraulics systems and planning for deck removal. The vessel was expected to be lifted out of the water in early February 2026 for out-of-water works. She was anticipated to return to service in late March or early April 2026, in time for the start of summer fisheries survey work.

Members received an update on the construction of FPV Nemo, which had begun in late 2024. The original contracted delivery date was 29 May 2025, and Ribcraft had most recently advised a revised date of 23 January 2026.

Since the previous meeting, officers had undertaken three additional visits to Ribcraft, bringing the total to eight. KEIFCA had communicated to Ribcraft that the scale of the delay was unreasonable, particularly given the contract terms.

On 15 December 2025, Andrew Jackson Solicitors, acting on behalf of KEIFCA, issued a letter to Ribcraft requesting proposals to achieve delivery by 23 January 2026

A meeting held at Ribcraft 13 January 2026 showed some progress, including the installation of the windows, although overall progress remained slower than expected. Officers had developed an assumed delivery timeline of March 2026 but expressed continued concern given the history of repeatedly missed deadlines. Weekly engagement with Ribcraft was ongoing.

Due to delays in transferring Nerissa to the Isle of Wight and in the delivery of Nemo, refit works for Tamesis had now been rescheduled to July 2026. This adjustment ensured that operational capability for enforcement and survey work would be maintained. Officers were using the additional time to refine the work specifications and obtain further quotations from boatyards, with initial quotes already being received.

12:15 Cllrs Goggin and Skeels leave the meeting

Members **NOTED** the report

43. TERMS OF REFERENCE AND STANDING ORDERS (B8)

The Clerk to the IFCA reminded Members that the Authority originally adopted its current Standing Orders and Code of Conduct in May 2017, and that these documents were subject to annual review.

Members were advised that two concerns had been raised by auditors as follows:

1. Public Contract Regulations – Recent amendments required local authorities to publicly advertise contracts valued over £30,000. The auditors advised that this

updated threshold must be applied consistently across the Authority's Financial Regulations and Standing Orders.

2. Member Allowances Documentation – The current documentation did not clearly define procedures for Member allowances, including travel and other allowable payments.

The Clerk reported that the Financial Regulations had been updated to include the following requirement:

- The Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) must publish information regarding any payment exceeding £30,000 under a public contract within 30 days of the end of the relevant quarter.

Members were informed of updated provisions regarding Member allowances, revised to improve clarity and consistency. The amendments included the following:

- MMO-Appointed Members: Entitled to a flat-rate daily allowance of £72.61 to compensate for loss of earnings, irrespective of meeting duration. General Members serving as Chairman or Vice Chairman were not permitted to claim both the financial loss allowance and Chairman/Vice Chairman allowance.
- Mileage Allowance: Reimbursement for travel using private vehicles would be set at His Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) business-travel rates.
- Parking, Tolls, Public Transport, Hotel Costs: Reimbursed at cost upon production of receipts; Members were expected to use the cheapest available public transport fare. Taxi fares were reimbursed only where public transport or private vehicle usage was impracticable.
- Chairman's Allowance: An annual allowance of £5,000 would be provided to reflect the additional responsibilities of the role, with an annual review by the Authority.
- Vice Chairman's Allowance: An annual allowance of £3,000 would be provided to reflect the additional responsibilities of the role, with an annual review by the Authority.

Officers confirmed that the remainder of the Terms of Reference and Standing Orders had been reviewed internally and that no further amendments were recommended at this time.

Members **APPROVED** the amendments to the Terms of Reference and Standing Orders.

44. MEETING DATES 2026/2027 (B9)

Members **APPROVED** the following meeting dates:

Monday 14 September 2026

Tuesday 24 November 2026

Tuesday 26 January 2027

Tuesday 25 May 2027

45. DRAFT ANNUAL PLAN 2026/2027

Members were provided with the draft Annual Plan for discussion. They were advised this was a draft plan which would need to be submitted to the Secretary of State by 31 March 2026. Members were asked to provide any comments directly to the CFO.

Members **APPROVED** the 2026/2027 Annual Plan subject to any comments made to the CFO

12:30 Mr Rowley left the meeting

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)

12:35 Meeting ended