

By: Assistant Chief Fishery Officer

To: Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority –
15 August 2014

Subject: **OUTSIDE AREA COCKLE FISHERY**

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: To consider opening of the Thames Estuary Cockle
Fishery outside area

1. Area Outside the Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery Order

During 2009 this fishery produced 1,353 tonnes of cockles and between 2010 and 2013 the fishery was kept closed.

Surveys of stocks outside the area of the Regulating Order were carried out through June and July 2014. Surveys showed that there were modest quantities of adult cockles in Area 7 and Area 10, although those in Area 7 were below 16mm. There also appear to be some large spat falls on some of the North Kent coast beds.

As previously reported, there have in recent years been mass mortality events in other parts of the country and as some vessels who work in the outside areas when open are from areas which have experienced mortality events, the Authority has previously taken a precautionary approach to the management of this fishery and elected to keep it closed. As discussed within the previous agenda item an emergency biosecurity byelaw has been drafted to address these issues for this season with a full cockle permitting flexible byelaw, which will be integrated into the existing TECFO management, in the development process for the 2015 fishery and onward

1. Stock Assessment

Surveys of stocks outside the area of the Regulating Order were carried out through June and July 2014. Surveys showed that there were modest quantities of adult

cockles in Area 7. Whilst the sizes of individual adult cockles in Area 7 are small, the density of cockles is not sufficient to meet the criteria set previously by the Authority for a reduction in minimum size therefore the minimum size for cockles in Area 7 will remain at 16mm.

In the past, once opened, decision making regarding management of stocks has been based upon the closure of beds once catch rates drop below prescribed levels. Previous management has not been based upon the setting of a Total Allowable Catch (TAC). This has sometimes resulted in uncertainty regarding how much fishing will be permitted before closure is implemented.

For many years the cockle fishery within the Regulating Order has been managed primarily by setting a TAC with the secondary protection of closure of beds when catch rates fall below the prescribed level. In 2009 a similar system of management was approved to be trialled for the area outside the Regulating Order. This is now possible given that sufficient survey data is available for these areas, this will also give improved management and protection to stocks and enable the Authority and the industry to know how many fishing trips will be permitted before the fishery starts.

Area	>16mm Adult TAC available (tonnes)
Area 7 - Ray	173
Area 7 - Buxey	206
Area 7 - Dengie	69
Total Available TAC	448

Table 1. Showing the stock available in each area. This is a maximum of a third of the total adult biomass.

As shown in Table 1 above there is the potential for a small fishery in the outside area in Area 7, which working on an assumption of 30 vessels working, would give 4 trips per vessel with implementation of the byelaw to reduce the quantity per trip to 6.8 m³. The actual number of trips would be based upon the number of vessels being inspected and would be discussed with the Chairman and Vice Chairman for final approval just before the commencement of the fishery. There would be no further trips assigned to the fishery and the fishery will not be extended even if less vessels actually take part in the fishery, further stocks are located or vessels suffer mechanical breakdown. Other areas of the district do contain some small quantities of cockles but not in sufficient quantities to meet the criteria for opening of the beds. In addition, only opening Area 7 enables effective control over the biosecurity measures being introduced under the Emergency Byelaw which, combined with setting out the number of trips, quantities and dates prior to the start of the fishery helps both officers and the industry prepare for this fishery. Opening of this fishery in this manner, after a lengthy period of closure, ensures that we can develop useful and successful management measures, including the biosecurity requirements by learning from this year, which can be encompassed within the full byelaw working towards the long term sustainability and success of the fishery in future years.

2. Management measures

Fishing allocations

The date of the fishery will depend on the number of vessels taking part, however the start date of the fishery will be 5th October 2014. The fishery will then close on 17th October 2014. Fishing will be permitted from midnight on Sunday until 12:00 Friday. Vessels will be permitted to undertake one trip per 24 hour period with no more than two trips in a week. This allocation is subject to change depending on the number of vessels applying for permits to fish before 25th August 2014.

Vessel Checks

Each vessel and its cockle gear will be cleaned of all cockle debris including the hold, deck and all spaces that may hold cockles. The pumps, pipes, dredges and riddles on each vessel would also be cleaned. This would involve washing with a fresh water pressure washer and scrubbing each part, the vessel and gear would then be allowed to dry. The vessel would then be submitted for inspection.

Vessel owners would be required to contact the KEIFCA office to book a time and date for inspection. All vessels would be inspected between 29th September and 1st October 2014 with KEIFCA officers travelling to the most recent working port of each vessel to check the vessel decks and holds are clean and where the pumps and pipes would be flushed through with sea water for an appropriate period of time.

If any vessel fails its inspection then it may not take part in the fishery. The permit holder may write to the Chairman and Vice Chairman to appeal the decision if the vessel fails and ask for a second inspection which must be undertaken between Thursday 2nd - Friday 3rd October 2014. After Friday 3rd October 2014 officers would not be able to inspect any more vessels. Each vessel would be inspected against the requirements of the Emergency byelaw. If the vessel passed it will be issued with an inspection certificate.

Bag inspections

Due to the logistical difficulties in inspecting and checking used cockle bags the Emergency Byelaw requires that for this season new KEIFCA cockle bags are used. The risk of atypical mortality issues being transported to the Thames is higher if old bags are used. Therefore vessels will be required to use new, unused bags for this fishery for every trip. Vessels will be informed in advance of the number of trips and number of bags required, for example; 4 trips per vessel of 6.8m³ requires 6 bags per trip which is a total of 24 bags. The cockle bags will be inspected by the KEIFCA officer during the biosecurity inspection.

Location of vessels

KEIFCA patrol vessels will be at sea throughout the period of the fishery ensuring that vessels only fish within the open areas and to monitor damage and catch rates. All vessels will be inspected in the first week of the fishery for a damage rate inspection for a gear certificate of approval to be issued.

Fishing vessels will be required to give notice to the cockle line upon leaving port providing information on which area they intend to fish in, and will also be required to give notice to the cockle line 2 hours before landing.

Non compliance

In the event of non-compliance by a vessel the standard maximum penalty for an emergency byelaw following a successful prosecution would apply.

The Authority is asked to **APPROVE** the actions listed above and provide a **RECOMMENDATION** on whether to open Area 7 of the cockle fishery outside area