

Success Criteria: 2,3,4 and 6

By: Assistant Chief IFCO

To: Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority –  
4 September 2014

Subject: **COCKLE FISHERY**

Classification: Unrestricted

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Summary: To report on Management of the Thames Estuary Cockle  
Fishery

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## **1. The Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery Order (TECFO)**

The hydraulic dredge cockle fishery was opened by the Authority on 22<sup>nd</sup> June. Catch rates have been modest although excessive amounts of weed contributed to this and catch rates improved as the weed was removed by weather. Industry reports and officer inspections have suggested that meat yields are excellent and that growth of individual cockles has been exceptional, although this has resulted in the shells of the cockles being thinner and weaker than average and vessels had to 'fine-tune' their gear to ensure as little damage as possible although all passed the damage rate inspections. Catches of the maximum of 11 tonnes were made by most vessels each trip and weather conditions have been good. There are reports from the industry of quantities of cockle spat (young cockles) on the grounds. This will be confirmed during the September surveys.

### **1.1 Total Allowable Catch for 2014 Fishery**

It was agreed at the last meeting that a provisional total allowable catch (TAC) of 6160 tonnes would be allocated and that any increases or changes would be subject to survey results and discussions with license holders showing that stocks were available in other areas and that growth was good. The allocation of fishing trips was changed following discussions with licence holders, the Chairman and the Vice Chairman after the first two weeks of the fishery. The number of trips and the TAC will stay the same, however the fishery will now finish a week earlier than originally planned, on the 26<sup>th</sup> September.

Recently, licence holders have written to ask for consideration to be given to increasing the number of trips this year as the yields are excellent, growth is good and the catch rates are high, attached as **Appendix 1**. As reported at the previous meeting, mortality of cockles over the 2013/14 winter was significant which lowered the total biomass of cockles on the grounds. Although growth is exceptional, the long-term sustainability of the population is however still reliant upon a good spat fall this year, and existing adult cockles reaching their maximum reproductive capability both for this year and next. Therefore, the 2014 TAC will continue to be subject to catch rates and the results of the cockle surveys in September, followed by discussions with the industry.

## **2. Outside Area fishery**

At an extraordinary meeting of the Authority on 15<sup>th</sup> August, a biosecurity emergency byelaw made on 5<sup>th</sup> August following discussions with the Chairman and Vice Chairman was discussed and approved with some amendments. The fishery will open on 5<sup>th</sup> October and operate for 1 week with two trips of 13.6m<sup>3</sup>, as reported in the minutes of that meeting.

The Authority is asked to **APPROVE** the actions listed above.