



DRAFT: Notes from the joint Agency Workshop to review the state of commercial fish stocks in the Thames.

11am – 4pm 25th September 2014, Tickfield Centre.

Aim: To address the concerns raised by members of the commercial fishing industry regarding the reduction in the amount of sole being caught in the Thames Estuary.

Dr Caroline Garaway (Chair)	UCL (Dept. Anthropology)
John Lamb	IFCA (Chair)
John Nichols	IFCA (Vice-Chair)
Peter Wexham	Local Councillor (IFCA member)
Will Wright	CIFCO
Dominic Bailey	ACIFCO
Joss Wiggins	PO
Barrie Smart	MMO
Rodger Mason	MMO
Steve Bewers	EA – Project Manager London Gateway
Daryl Clifton-Dey	EA
Neil Dunlop	EA – Senior Environmental Officer (Tideway & Water Quality)
Carl O'Brien	CEFAS
Tanya Ferry	Port of London
Chris Webb	London Gateway – Environmental Coordinator
Mark Lee	London Gateway – H R Wallingford (quality assurance)
Marie Pendle	London Gateway – H R Wallingford (quality assurance)
Amy Pryor	TEP
Mervyn Littlewood	Chair of the TEP Dredging and Sediment Liaison Group
Steve Colclough	Institute of Fisheries Management / Consultant (Ex- EA)
Tom Brown	Fisherman Thanet Fishermens Association
Paul Gilson	Fisherman Southend
Glyn Gilson	Fisherman Southend
Tom Brown	Thanet Fishermen's Association
Leon Roskilly	Local Recreational Angler (IFCA member)
Michael Sharp	Local Recreational Angler (IFCA member)

There was a short discussion concerning the dissemination of information from this meeting and all parties agreed to publically share their presentations in the KEIFCA website after the meeting. Participants agreed to KEIFCA making and distributing 'bullet point' notes as a record of the meeting.

1. Identifying the problem (Summary of problem agreed by participants at the meeting)

- ⇒ Stakeholder feel major changes on a large scale Medway/ Outer Thames
- ⇒ Lots of different sectors using the river concerned
 - Fish sizes and numbers dramatic loss



- Worries about change in habitat
- ⇒ Worries about human impact
- ⇒ Extreme weather
- ⇒ Problem complex

2. Fishers observations

Presentation – Fishing in the Thames (MMO) Barry Smart (Presentation on KEIFCA website www.kentandessex-ifca.gov.uk)

In addition to the key points made by the slides in the presentation

- Discussion concerning the number of fishing vessels taking the quota, and that the landings data did not indicate effort targeting the stock.
- The data was useful in showing trends but further analysis was required to draw more conclusions.

Presentation – Fishermen's observations Paul Gilson (Presentation on KEIFCA website www.kentandessex-ifca.gov.uk)

In addition to the key points made by the slides in the presentation

- There was a discussion concerning which regulator is responsible for regulating different activities in the Thames and which regulator local stakeholders should contact to address the issues concerned.
- There was a wide ranging debate concerning the changes in the sediment/habitat on the Southend foreshore. Pictures and stakeholder observations suggesting sediment changes along the foreshore were discussed, with suggested causes ranging from the changes being a direct result of the London Gateway Port dredging to relatively natural fluctuations that were the result of climatic conditions and a dynamic estuary.
- A discussion was then held around the poor catches of Dover sole in the estuary with fishermen giving examples of the paucity of current catches. There was then a debate into potential reasons for a significant drop off in catches and the change in landings. A number of factors were discussed from changing seabed habitat to the reduction and potential disappearance in whiteweed beds. Numerous factors including pollutants were put forward however it was difficult to find a common theme especially when as Dover sole numbers seemed to be low whereas thornback ray numbers seemed to be good.

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- A proposal was made to focus efforts on developing a project that would aggregate and analyse all the different data held by stakeholders and use it to draw more distinct conclusions trying to explain changes in the estuary. The project received support from all



participants, with a call for thought to be put into making sure such a study was focused and not too academic.

3. Fish stocks

*Presentation – Analysis of stock data for Dover Sole in the North Sea (CEFAS) Carl O'Brien
(Presentation on KEIFCA website www.kentandessex-ifca.gov.uk)*

In addition to the key points made by the slides in the presentation

- Fishermen reflected on the importance of the CEFAS small fish survey and wanted to express their concern that sample stations in the Thames were now not being surveyed. CEFAS explained that due to cuts in survey expenditure and these sites were dropped as they were an addition to the other samples used to define scientific stock parameters.
- There was a short discussion about PAHs levels, its impact on fish development and that a high reading had been recorded in the Medway. The debate expanded into a discussion about the use of de-icer run-off at Southend airport. London Gateway Port made the comment that PAHs had been tested as part of their surveys and that results levels were within agreed levels and had been rigorously checked.
- There was then a discussion regarding the history of the dredging of the Thames which dated back over 200 years and the impact of the managed use of the Yantlet channel and the realignment of sea reach in the 1960's. The PLA discussed the dredging licence procedure and the tensions between dredging at different times of year, and issuing a licence that was practical as well as environmentally appropriate. The PLA also made a request for stakeholders to share and input their data especially in the outer Thames so that more data could be used in weighing up licence applications.

4. Data gathered as part of the London Gateway project

Presentation – Covering: Summary of London Gateway water monitoring (Presentation on KEIFCA website www.kentandessex-ifca.gov.uk)

In addition to the key points made by the slides in the presentation

- There was a general discussion concerning the amount and impact of fresh water in the Thames over the winter and early spring as well as how the Thames barrier was used during this period and reflections on the Thames after previous periods of high rain fall. There was a range of opinion as to the impact of the freshwater on the Thames, with some stakeholders feeling that similar events had happened in the past without such drastic impacts on the Dover sole catches, whilst other participants felt that data indicated an important relationship between the salinity of the water and the number of Dover sole recorded. Some fishermen also felt that catches of Dover sole had started to drop from 2010 onwards.
- The creation of new inter-tidal mudflats as mitigation for the loss of bird feeding areas was also discussed in the context of the public enquiry conclusions. These areas will also benefit fish. Participants reflected on the benefits of this approach to the sole recruitment process and possible benefit of it in the future.



- There was a discussion about what short term steps could be taken to help the sole stocks recover as local fishermen raised concerns about current and future catches. There was a then a discussion concerning the possibilities of a Dover sole enhancement scheme in the shape of a hatchery. All participants agreed that this was a good route to start to explore.

5. *Identified key areas for action*

- **ACTION: Compile a regulators 'who does what' document to distribute to stakeholders.**
- **ACTION: All stakeholders agreed that an independent project should be developed to aggregate and analyse all the different data held by stakeholders and use it to draw more distinct conclusions trying to explain changes in the estuary.**
 - ⇒ **The Thames Estuary Partnership offered to help compile a list of data sources from different stakeholders regulators**
 - ⇒ **Thames Estuary partnership help to develop a project brief with help from other organisations and with future discussions to be held at the next fisheries liaison meeting in December 2014.**
 - ⇒ **All participants to help develop funding case for the project and to look at resources that could be allocated to this report.**
- **ACTION: London Gateway Ports to continue to explore the options around a Sole enhancement scheme and make best endeavours to further develop options for a Dover sole hatchery. London Gateway Ports to continue to update stakeholders as to progress as the project develops.**