



Agenda item B4

By: Chief and Assistant Chief Officers

To: Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority – Technical Panel 6 March 2015

Subject: Bass Nursery Areas Discussion paper

Classification Unrestricted

Summary: proposals to develop protected nursery areas

Introduction

In putting this paper together officers have tried to develop the ideas of the proposals agreed by the Authority at the last meeting. The paper has been drafted to start and focus discussions regarding the process of developing protected nursery areas in the KEIFCA district and help officers plan work streams and resource needs for this project over the next financial year.

Background – Developing protected nursery areas and starting a community conversation

As discussed at the Authority meeting in January 2015 the present distribution of bass nursery areas does not adequately protect the bass stocks in the district and a root and branch reassessment of bass nursery areas needs to be undertaken. KEIFCA sees itself as best placed to undertake this task but as this is such a substantial piece of work it is vital that we work with other organisations and with the local communities to develop management for these areas. It is also important that we undertake this work as thoroughly as possible, developing a strong evidence base and involving the community in this process. Although this approach can take longer initially, buy-in from the community helps achieve high levels of compliance as well as deliver the overall aims of the management.

Although bass is an important stock in our district and there is compelling evidence to act quickly to protect the stocks, a wide range of other commercial and non-commercial fish species also rely heavily on these habitats. Developing management for these in conjunction with bass measures would help conserve these stocks and derive the maximum possible from the process.

Many marine species use estuaries as nursery grounds, tending to utilise the inner estuary for the first one to three years of life and progressively moving

downstream as they age. Even within this pattern there are differing salinity tolerances. Sole breed in the lower reaches of estuaries. The lower and middle reaches may be very important sole nursery grounds, but they do not penetrate into the inner reaches. By contrast 0+ bass will penetrate deep into brackish water. Species such as flounder and smelt can range across the whole estuary, but even here, the youngest age groups will be most common in the inner estuary in brackish or freshwater conditions in the summer months. All of the life stages of these species move down to the lower estuary in the winter as freshwater flows increase and temperatures reduce. The intertidal margins are where most primary productivity occurs and these shallow, warm, productive habitats act as key nursery grounds in estuaries. Research also suggests that salt marshes may represent the optimal nursery habitat for 0+ sea bass.

The Bass Nursery area review process

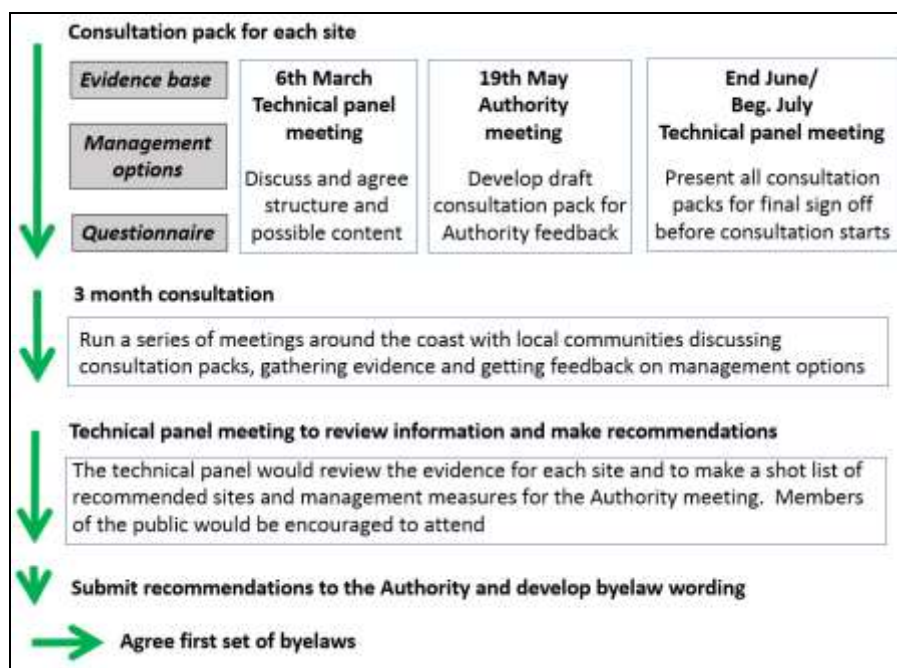
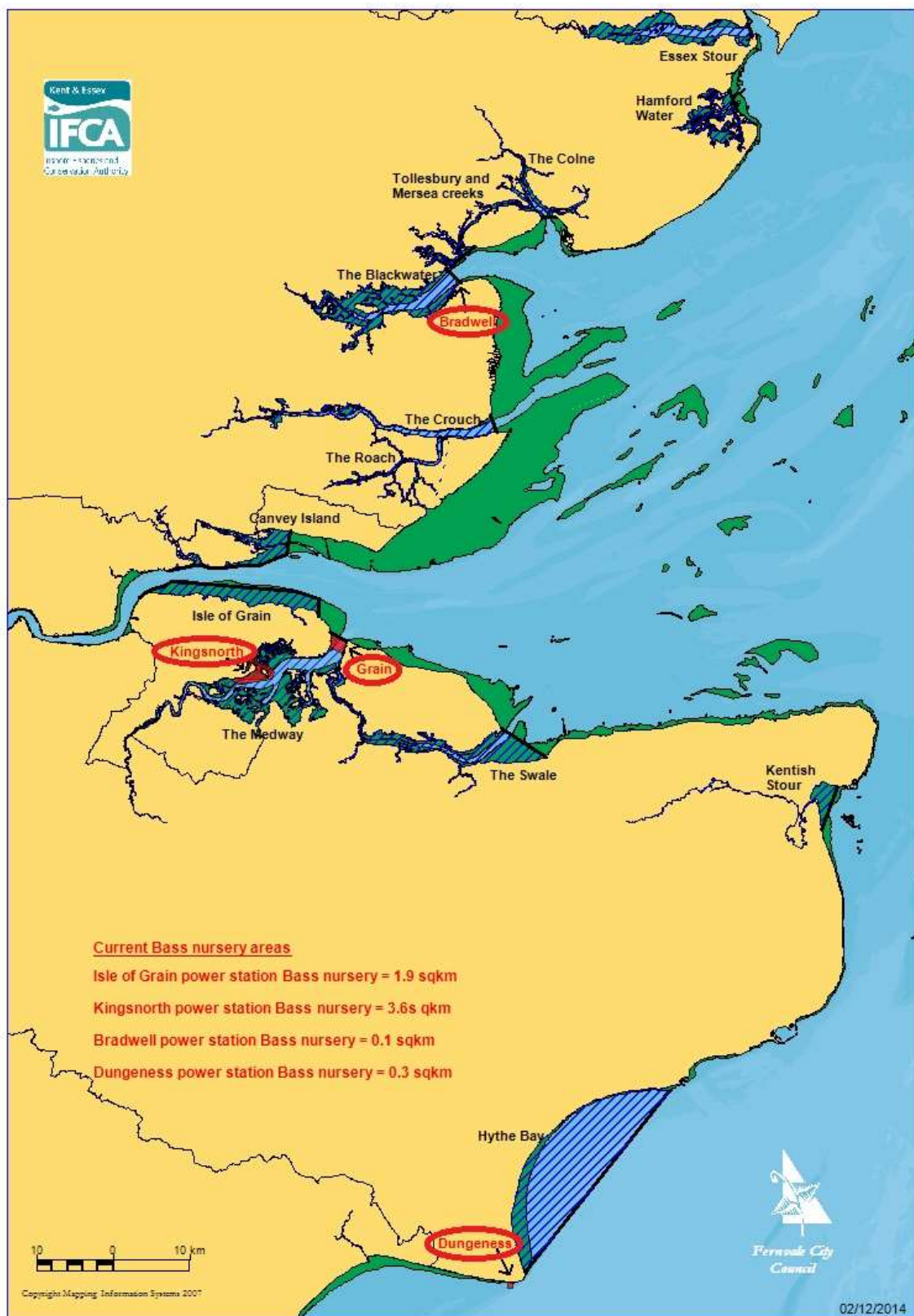


Fig. 1 Summary of the KEIFCA Bass nursery area consultation process.

It is suggested that the review would take place in two sections (Fig. 1); the first would be the development of an evidence base and a dialog with the local communities for the estuarine and bay waterbodies identified in Fig. 2 (create a longlist). It is suggested that the IFCA would run a consultation with the local communities over a number of months and ask for comment and feedback on the possible management options suggested. At the end of this period a technical panel would be held that would review the evidence gathered for each site and would prioritise an initial list of sites (two to three) to go forward for more detailed development of management and legislation (create a short list).

Fig. 2 The long list of Bass nursery area sites to put forward in the consultation



The consultation pack – What should be in it?

In suggesting that significant time and resource should be allocated to the development of the evidence pack for each site and the associated consultation documents with potential management options, although the Authority has made it clear that management measures for bass need to be developed quickly, it is vital that we try and get as many people as possible on-board with this process and the reasons why the Authority are taking this action. Without spending time developing such agreement, enforcement of any proposed management measures will always become more challenging.

Experience from the MCZ process shows that having a clear, concise, well thought out consultation with potential management measures that people can understand and comment on, is critical to success. Spending time developing and agreeing this process, the tone and structure of the documents as well as the methods of engaging with people is key to the success of this project. The advantage however is that once undertaken, it allows us to move quickly with making legislation.

Evidence base – suggested outline and scope

The evidence base needs to be written in easily accessible language with diagrams and pictures used so that it can be easily understood by members of the public. A good example of the type of information we could in our document was a report produced by Steve Colclough in 2010 (Appendix 1). Each evidence base summary needs to be no more than 5 pages long. More information could be held on a website link.

- Background information on bass stocks (using ICES)
- Update on the international and national progress on bass management.
- KEIFCA plans and process
- Information on advantages of nursery areas
- Information about why estuaries and bays are important

Possible management measures

Taking a broad approach initially to the possible introduction of management measures (Table 1) allows a range of different options to be explored for each area, and tailor the management response to the need and function of each site. The use of voluntary measures and well as legislative measures are explored and the advantages and disadvantages of these different options could be framed as part of the consultation. There is also the opportunity, especially in estuaries to have different areas managed in different ways.

Table 1. A list of possible management measures that could be used within the identified nursery areas. Interested parties would be asked to comment on the implementation and appropriateness of the management measures described below. Different areas of a site could be managed in different ways.

	Angling	Netting	Trawling
Technical measures			
Voluntary increase in minimum size for sweet of fish	•	•	•
Legislative increase in minimum size for sweet of fish	•	•	•
Voluntary increase in mesh size in specific areas	•	•	•
Legislative increase in mesh size in specific areas	•	•	•
Technical restrictions on the length of gear and type		•	
Capture/release bass fishery	•		
Spatial and temporal measures			
No fishing areas	•	•	•
Closed seasons	•	•	•
Closed areas	•	•	•
No fishing for bass	•	•	•
Permit to fish in area	•	•	•
Effort control measures			
Voluntary bag limit	•		
Legislative bag limit	•		

Developing a questionnaire

KEIFCA have developed questionnaires previously for other consultations and projects (Appendix 2) and where possible we would try and set out the questionnaire so it is as easy possible to fill in using a combination of tick boxes and open reply boxes. The questionnaires could be site specific and method

specific and we could also set up the questionnaire on our website. The type of questions we could ask could include:

<i>Who are you?</i>	<i>Where do you fish?</i>	<i>What type of gear do you fish with?</i>	<i>Are you commercial or recreational fisher?</i>
<i>How often do you fish?</i>	<i>What species do you target?</i>	<i>How much fish do you catch?</i>	<i>How much fish do you keep/land?</i>
<i>What times of year do you fish?</i>	<i>When do you target bass?</i>	<i>Where do you target bass?</i>	<i>How important is bass to your income?</i>

Within each gear type we could then ask each respondent to comment on the possible management measures within each area, and propose a possible management solution.

Running the consultation

Explaining the consultation and the issues surrounding the consultation will be a key part of trying to engage with the local communities based around the estuaries and bays being consulted upon. Using our Authority members, community contacts, our website and e-bulletin to advertise and support people contributing to the consultation will be key to running an effective consultation process. As the issues are relatively complex, specific meetings could be held to explain the issues in detail and help individuals and groups fill in the questionnaire and reply to the consultation. Although this would be a preferred strategy, effective meetings do take a lot of resource and officer time to undertake so the coordination of such meetings would need to be well planned.

Reporting the results of the consultation and deciding on the next steps

It is difficult to predict quite how much feedback and engagement we will have from the community and consequently quite how much time it will take to produce summary data for each site, however a specific technical panel will be held to work through the evidence and the prioritise an initial list of sites (two to three) to go forward for more detailed development of management and legislation (create a short list).

It is suggested the Technical Panel would review the evidence for each site and to make recommendations for the Authority meeting. Members of the public would be encouraged to attend the meeting and to provide evidence to the Technical Panel. The shortlisted recommendations would then be discussed by the Authority a quarterly meeting, hopefully with the instruction to draft specific wording for a byelaw and associated impact assessment. Following this the statutory byelaw process would be followed.

Members are asked to discuss the following points and make recommendations regarding the proposed process

- 1) The scope, structure and timing of the consultation/ review process described in the paper**
- 2) The content, structure and scope of the evidence pack**
- 3) The management measures that should be included in the consultation**
- 4) The structure and content of the accompanying questionnaire**
- 5) The process for reviewing the evidence from the consultation and making recommendations to the Authority**