



Agenda item B5

Success Criteria 2,3,4 and 6

By: Assistant Chief IFCO

To: Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority – 19 May 2015

Subject: **PERMITTED COCKLE FISHERY MANAGEMENT**

Classification Unrestricted

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Summary: To consider management of the 2015 Permitted Cockle Fishery

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**1. Permitted Cockle Fishery 2014**

As previously reported the 2014 fishery started on 5 October 2014 and was open for 1 week with each vessel being permitted to make two trips. During this period a total of 716 tonnes were taken from Area 7, which is comprised of the Ray Sands, the Dengie Sands and the Buxey Sands.

**2. Cockle Fishery Flexible Permit Byelaw**

At the last Authority meeting it was reported that the new flexible permitting byelaw for the cockle fishery outside of the Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery Order 1994 was going through a statutory consultation process. Following the consultation process the byelaw was signed by the Secretary of State and came into force on 10 February 2015. At the same time, the six existing byelaws which contained the management for the fishery and the two emergency byelaws (for biosecurity and gear type) introduced by the Authority last year were revoked as these measures are now all contained within the single byelaw.

The new process for the management of this fishery each year is that anyone wishing to apply for a permit is required to apply by 31 March in that year and all stock assessment surveys will be completed before the May Authority meeting. This ensures that the Authority can be presented

with a complete picture of the fishery, including the amount of stock available and the number of vessels wishing to work it.

## **2.1 Appropriate Assessment**

The Authority is required under Regulation 48(3) of the Conservation (Natural Habitats) Regulations 1994, Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 the Authority to give notice to Natural England of intention to issue permits to fish for cockles within designated SSSI, SPA and Ramsar inter-tidal sites. The Authority is also required to submit an "Appropriate Assessment". This assessment includes survey data, fishery monitoring and details of mitigation implemented to ensure that there is no adverse impact upon these sites as a result of the Authority's action. The Appropriate Assessment and formal notification has been provided to Natural England and a response is currently awaited.

## **2.2 Number of Permit Applications**

In 2014, permits were issued for 37 fishing vessels to work the cockle fishery. For 2015, the number of permit applications has risen to 42. Forty of these applications are for Category 1 permits which would be permitted, should the fishery open, to take up to 13.6m<sup>3</sup> per trip. Two of these applications were for the smaller Category 2 permits, which permit up to 6.8m<sup>3</sup> per trip.

## **2.3 Spring 2015 Cockle Stock Surveys**

Stock surveys commenced on 7 April 2015 and were completed by 24 April 2015. At this time of year the cockles are coming into condition for their spring spawning following the winter dormant period. These surveys took a total of 12 survey days to complete using a Day grab deployed from FPV Tamesis, covering a total area of 37.6 km<sup>2</sup> (14.5 miles<sup>2</sup>) with a total of 287 grab samples being taken. The areas surveyed covered the Buxey, Ray and Dengie Sands, Minnis Bay, Leysdown and Pegwell Bay, which include all of the current main production areas outside of the TECFO (a chart showing the production areas is attached at Appendix A).

As reported above the Authority's management of the fishery is subject to an Appropriate Assessment which has been provided to Natural England. This includes details of specified management criteria.

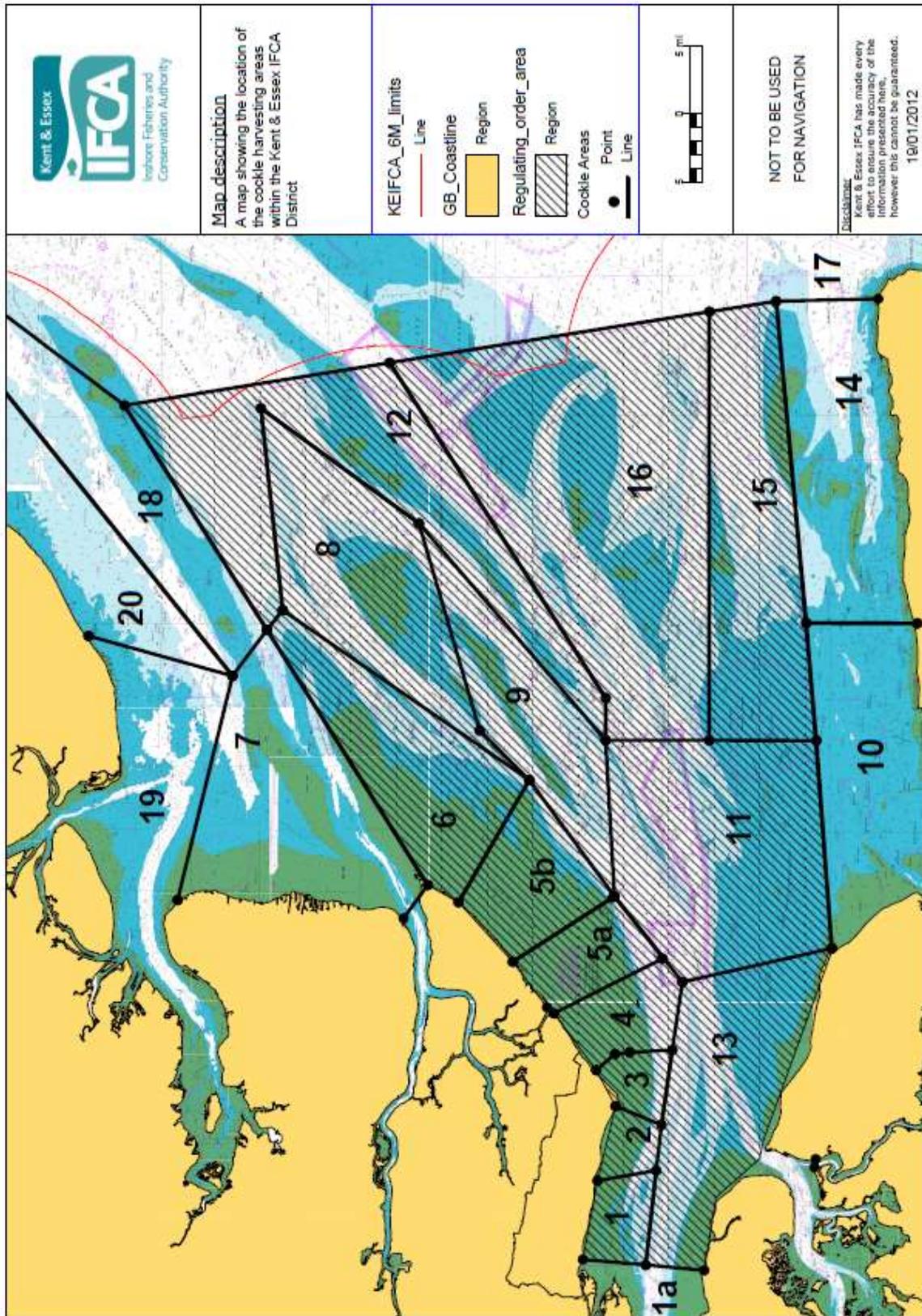
## **2.4 2015 Fishery Management**

Analysis of this survey data has now been completed. The survey shows that as in recent years, the Ray, Dengie and Buxey Sands are the most productive beds and that the other areas contain very few cockles suitable for commercial harvesting. The recommended maximum Total Allowable Catch (TAC) that can be taken from the beds will be less than 780 tonnes.

This figure divided by the total number of vessels which have applied for a permit would result in each vessel only being permitted to undertake one fishing trip. Given that the cockles in these areas are relatively slow growing compared to the cockles in the licensed fishery and that half the population of cockles currently on the grounds are below the minimum size of 16mm, it would seem prudent to not open the fishery this year and refund the permit fees which have been paid with each application as specified in the byelaw.

**Recommendation – That the Authority APPROVE the above management measures to keep the beds in the permitted cockle fishery closed and refund the permit application fees to all applicants.**

# Appendix A



A chart showing the cockle production areas within the Kent and Essex IFCA District

