Agenda Item B8

Success Criteria: 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6

By: Lead Scientific and Conservation Officer

To: Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority – 4 September 2015

Subject: **MARINE PROTECTED AREAS UPDATE**

Classification Unrestricted

Summary: To report on progress in the Habitat Regulations Assessments of fishing gear in European Marine Sites and progress on specific management in Folkestone Pomerania and Blackwater, Crouch Roach and Colne MCZs

---

1. Signing of the Folkestone Pomerania byelaw

On 26th July 2015 the Secretary of State signed a byelaw banning the use of bottom towed fishing gear in the Folkestone Pomerania Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ). This MCZ, designated in November 2013, is located approximately 6 km from the south-east Kent coastline and covers an area of approximately 33.6km^2. The soft muddy areas within the MCZ support dense ross worm reefs and honeycomb worm reefs. This mix of habitats is not known to occur elsewhere in the south-east area and this MCZ is one of only two in the country that protect honeycomb worm reefs. We would like to thank all the people that have contributed to the development of this byelaw.

2. Update on Hythe Bay

Following the agreement of the Authority a letter was sent to Defra on 15 June 2015 (Appendix 1). The issue has been discussed with Defra officials but as of going to press with the current papers we have not received a reply. We have continued to work with the MMO on the inshore vessel monitoring project,

however it seems that the project is still in the product testing stage and is still probably over 6 months away from being able to use.

3. Defra MPA update

As we move towards the Defra 2016 deadline for EMS and tranche 1 MCZ management measures to be implemented, KEIFCA has worked constructively through the Association of IFCAs to feedback progress to Defra. As discussed previously KEIFCA have worked hard to prioritise this work and deliver management as quickly as possible against these priorities. One aspect that we have been making very clear to Defra has been the lack of additional time to complete this specialised work. In a letter dated 30th June 2015 (Appendix 2) Defra have thanked the IFCA for the significant strides made to date and have contributed additional funding to IFCAs for this project. From the £300K allocation KEIFCA have received £39,020. Due to the tight timelines involved, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman an IFC officer has been appointed to undertake this work on a year's contract. Since the letter, a meeting has been held with Defra to discuss IFCA delivery plans. The meeting was very useful and Defra have indicated that they will work with the Association of IFCAs to make sure the correct plans and progress is being reported.

4. Fisheries in European Marine Sites – Habitat Regulations Assessments

At the May 2015 authority meeting, KEIFCA approved the overall outcomes of the 365 tests of likely significant effect which are the first stage of assessment of the effect of fishing gear on features of the European Marine Sites. Since then, minor edits have been made to these following updated advice from Natural England and these are currently being reviewed by Natural England for final formal advice. Unfortunately this has taken longer than expected as even the most minor change means that all the tests need to be updated. Once Natural England have given their formal advice we would be happy to share the documents.

For those fishing gears that are deemed likely to have a significant effect on the feature or where there is insufficient evidence to state that there will be no significant effect to the EMS features, a more in-depth appropriate assessment is required. Since the last Authority meeting, three of the ten required appropriate assessments have been completed and passed to Natural England for review and advice. An additional three appropriate assessments are currently in progress.

5. Native oyster management within the Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne MCZ area.

5.1. Oyster restoration project in the Ray Sand Channel and the Blackwater

The Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne Estuaries Marine Conservation Zone (BCRC MCZ) was designated in November 2013 with conservation objectives to recover native oysters and native oyster beds to favourable condition. It has been identified and acknowledged by Natural England that human intervention is necessary to recover native oyster stocks.

Oystermen have traditionally dragged chains (harrows) over the oyster grounds to remove excess silt and mud, which should clean the ground, exposing the underlying cultch (shell or rock) thus creating a better surface for oyster spat to settle on. There is currently little data available examining the effectiveness of this method in cleaning the ground and increasing native oyster settlement. However annual harrowing within the Tollesbury and Mersea Several Order is believed to have contributed to increased native oyster stocks. The fishing industry also believes that using an oyster dredge over the oyster ground can also remove excess silt and mud that covers the cultch. It is believed that leaving the oyster ground untouched will not recover the native oyster stocks and that human intervention to control siltation of the oyster beds is necessary to fulfil the conservation objectives of the MCZ.

Following the approval by the authority at the previous meeting in May 2015 to invest £7,500 per annum for the next three years to undertake oyster restoration trials, work began on 25th June 2015. In order to test the effectiveness of harrowing in removing silt from underlying oyster cultch, test areas in the mouth of the river Blackwater and in the Ray Sand channel were used.

Three test areas in the river Blackwater and 3 test areas in the Ray Sand channel were harrowed for 20 hours each in June and July 2015 by the oystermen and paid for by KEIFCA. Each test site was 150m x 500m and was located on subtidal mixed sediment or subtidal mud habitats in the mouth of the River Blackwater, and on subtidal muddy sand in the Ray Sand Channel, as identified from the latest modelled biotope data provided by Natural England (Feb. 2015). Adjacent to all six harrow test sites were six control sites of the same size where no harrowing took place. All test and control sites were surveyed using day grab, underwater cameras and side scan sonar before and after harrowing and the vessels undertaking harrowing used GPS plotters to track the harrow tracks. So far, one initial pre-harrowing survey and two post-harrowing surveys (at one week and six weeks after harrowing) have been conducted by KEIFCA officers using FPV Tamesis. The visibility was not enough to gather video or photos of the seabed, however sediment samples have been

collected using the day grab and side scan sonar images clearly showed the tracks of the harrows. The analysis of this data will be completed over the coming months.

The ongoing work forms part of a management plan drafted by KEIFCA in conjunction with the oyster fishermen and with approval from the Essex Native Oyster Restoration Initiative (E-NORI).

Future planning

Throughout the duration of the project, annual surveys will be conducted by KEIFCA on the sites and adjacent areas to monitor the effect of the restoration works. It is proposed that before the end of the three year project the success, or otherwise, of the works would be evaluated and application for grant funding would be made on the basis of evidence gathered during the trial in order to continue the project.

Members are asked to **NOTE** these reports and make **COMMENT** on them