



Agenda Item B3

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

By: Lead Scientific and Conservation Officer

To: Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority – 22nd January 2016

Subject: **A summary of the KEIFCA whelk technical panel meeting and review of current management measures.**

Classification Unrestricted

Summary: To report on the current harvesting levels of whelk stocks in the district and review the current scientific research and views of permit holders in determining future Technical Permit Requirements for the KEIFCA whelk permit byelaw.

In November 2011 KEIFCA introduced an emergency byelaw limiting the number of whelk pots that can be used in the district to 300. At the 18th January 2013 Authority meeting a decision was made to develop a flexible byelaw to help sustainably manage the whelk stocks in the long-term and it was agreed to design a byelaw that allowed the number of whelk pots, the riddle gap size and the number and size of escape holes to be periodically reviewed. In April 2013 the byelaw was signed by the Secretary of State and permits were issued under the new legislation. Under the whelk permit byelaw it is required to review the technical specifications at least every 3 years, of which this year is the first large scale review. This 3 year review takes account of new research into whelk populations and analysis of the KEIFCA whelk fishery over the past few years.

A technical panel of the Kent and Essex IFCA (KEIFCA) met on 7th January 2016 to review the technical specifications of the KEIFCA whelk permit byelaw that was introduced in 2013 with the following objective:

To review the technical specifications of the whelk permit byelaw and make recommendations to the full KEIFCA for future whelk permit byelaw technical specifications.

Papers (appendix 1) and notes of the meeting (appendix 2) from the whelk technical panel meeting are in the appendices for reference along with the whelk permit byelaw (appendix 3). Industry, scientists and regulators presented data to the technical panel and options were discussed for future management with the outcome of making the following recommendations to the Kent and Essex IFCA:

1. that the pot limit and number of tags issued is **NOT** increased and remains set at **300** for category one permits and **10** for category two permits;
2. given the new research showing that the size at maturity is above 45 mm for most of the district the minimum size of escape holes and minimum riddle sizes are **INCREASED** to 25 mm; and
3. that the minimum number of escape holes **REMAINS** the same at 2 per pot.

An assessment of the impact of the proposed technical change to the byelaw

A presentation at the authority meeting will summarise the outcomes of the whelk technical panel meeting and the justification for the above recommendations.

Proposed changes to the whelk permit technical specifications would require a review of the impact assessment of the byelaw. In summary, the increase in escape hole and riddle size could potentially result in an initial reduction in revenue for fishermen from a reduced catch per unit effort. This would be caused by having to return whelks with a width range of 22 to 25mm that would have been retained by the current 22 mm riddle but which would pass through the new proposed 25 mm riddle. Officers are currently carrying out trials with industry to examine the reduction in catch that would occur by increasing the riddle size alone and an update paper will be presented to the authority at the meeting. However, by also increasing the escape hole size in pots it is likely that more of these smaller whelks could escape, leaving space for more larger whelks and the actual catch per pot may not decrease by much but the size of whelks in the catch would increase.

There would be a cost to fishermen for purchasing a new riddle and increasing the size of escape holes in pots. It is estimated that a new riddle would cost between £200 and £800 and it would take one person approximately 3 days to increase the escape hole size in 300 pots.

Following the Technical Panel meeting letters have been received from fishermen. These are provided as Appendix 4

It is **RECOMMENDED** that the Authority makes the above changes to the Technical Permit Requirements.

Development of a long-term management plan and research project to help inform and direct future management

In the longer term, in addition to continuing to review the technical specifications of the permit byelaw it is proposed that a longer term whelk management plan is written. This would set out the objectives for management and pathways to achieving a sustainable whelk stock. In addition to outlining management mechanisms it would also set out the research required to inform and assess the effectiveness of any management. Main advantages of a longer term plan would be to assist fishermen in their longer term business plans and to enable measures are in place to protect the stock, thus protecting future fishing opportunities.

Future proposed research to be included in the plan would include:

1. Working closely with local fishermen to gather additional whelk samples to analyse seasonal and spatial variability in whelks.
2. Gathering additional whelk samples from Hythe Bay to compare the data to previous data collected by the EA over 10 years ago. This would allow longer term trends in whelk populations to be assessed.
3. Working with local industry to gather information on whelks caught in trawls or dredges. This would provide a more accurate estimate of the natural distribution and stock level of whelks than catching them in baited pots.
4. Collecting data on whelk numbers, sizes and distribution during the annual KEIFCA native oyster dredge survey in Essex. This will utilise current survey time to collect additional data on the natural distribution of whelks in Essex and can be compared with the whelks that were caught in pots in the same area.

It is proposed that funding from the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund is applied for to fund some of the proposed research ideas with additional funding coming from the KEIFCA research budget. Possibilities of collaborating with academic researchers for longer term studies will also be explored in order to deliver a more cost effective research plan.

It is **RECOMMENDED** that the Authority approves the drafting of a longer term whelk management and research plan.