



Agenda Item No. B2

By: Lead Scientific and Conservation Officer
To: Kent and Essex IFCA – 29th November 2016
Subject: **2016 Cockle Fishery Management**
Classification: Unrestricted

Summary:

This paper will provide Members with a summary of the cockle fishery management for 2016 together with the data obtained from surveys carried out.

Recommendations:

Members are asked to **CONSIDER** this report and **APPROVE** the management of the Thames Cockle Fishery Order as specified.

Background:

1. Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery Order

The cockle fishery within the area of the Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery Order opened between 26th June and 7th October 2016. At the Authority meeting on 20th May 2016, the Authority approved the following fishing trips allocation:

Landings per Specified Fishing Period

26 th June – 15 th July (3 weeks)	2 specified landings per period
17 th July – 23 rd September (10 weeks)	3 specified landings per period
25 th September – 7 th October (2 weeks)	2 specified landings per period

Catches of the maximum of 13.6 m³ were made by most vessels each trip and weather conditions were generally good. The total allowable catch (TAC) of 6160 tonnes that was agreed by the Authority in May 2016 was maintained for the season.

Industry reported high meat yields and multiple spat fall events throughout the season.

The vessel monitoring system (VMS+), was used for monitoring and enforcement of the fishery in 2016 and analysis of these data will be used for subsequent Habitat Regulations Assessments of the cockle fishery which are required for the opening of the fishery.

1(a) Cockle Stock Surveys 2016

Cockle stock surveys were completed between 17th to 20th September 2016 for the main cockle harvesting areas within the TECFO on the Maplin and Foulness sands. The number of adult cockles was lower than the last 3 years, following the same pattern as seen in spring (Fig. 1).

Multiple spat fall events reported by the industry were also observed in the September cockle survey with approximately 3 different size groups of spat. The number of spat observed in the survey were the highest since 1998 (Fig. 2).

In 2015, cockles grew poorly during the summer however, this year there was a much higher growth rate between spring and autumn compared to last year in all areas of the Maplin and Foulness sands. As a result of higher growth rates, the average weight of cockles in each age class was also higher than last year and more typical of weights from earlier years.

The following graphs show population numbers of adult cockles and spat for 2016 compared to earlier years.

Fig. 1: Adult cockle stock size in Spring and Autumn from 2001 to 2016

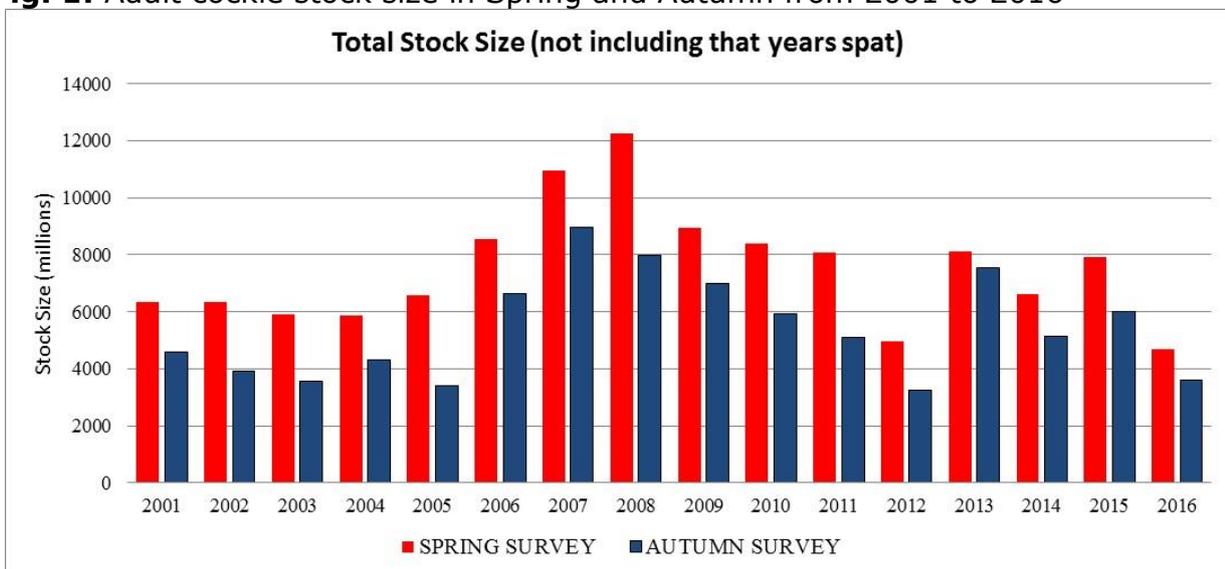
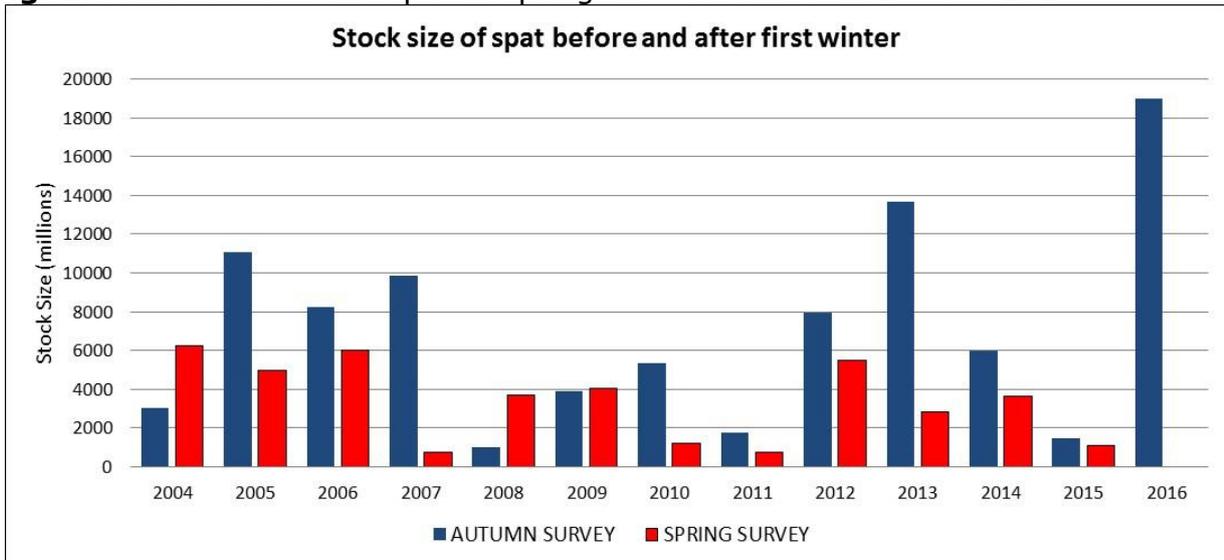


Fig. 2: Numbers of cockle spat in Spring and Autumn from 2004 to 2016



1 (b). Outlook for 2017 fishery and beyond

There is a good outlook for the fishery in the next two years. High spat fall with multiple spawning events this year, in combination with good growth rates will likely lead to an increase in TAC for the fishery in 2017 and 2018, however this will be dependent on survival of the spat over the winter and high growth rates in spring 2017. Weather and predation will be important factors in the winter survival and the spring cockle survey will assess survival rates and stock available for the 2017 fishery.

Members are asked to **CONSIDER** this report and **APPROVE** the management of the Thames Cockle Fishery Order as specified.