

Agenda Item C3

Report on the patrol vessels 'Tamesis' and 'Blue Jacket' Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority Report for the period September – November 2016

Vessel priorities:

- Medway No Take Zone Enforcement
- Whelk Fishery Enforcement
- Several Orders Enforcement
- Cockle Fishery Enforcement
- Oyster survey
- Whelk Survey
- Candidate interviews

Fisheries Enforcement

Both Tamesis and Blue Jacket were deployed across the district in this period, and each vessel spent a period working from both Brightlingsea and Ramsgate. Vessels were used in conjunction with vessel tracking (VMS+) and directed shore patrols to monitor the cockle fishery and focus targeted enforcement efforts. Additional enforcement priorities for the period were gear inspections especially collecting intelligence on whelk gear fishing areas, as well as patrols on Several Orders, the North Kent Coast and the Medway No Take Zone. Towards the end of the quarter the weather started to deteriorate, having a knock-on impact on sea based enforcement.

Whilst the build of Nerissa has been finalised, the majority of targeted sea-based enforcement has been carried out by the 7.8m RIB Blue Jacket. Blue Jacket has proved invaluable over the last quarter and has been especially useful when working in estuaries on the Essex coast. Blue Jacket allows a greater flexibility in sea based enforcement as fewer officers are required to crew her and her speed allows specific enforcement issues to be targeted quickly. A total of eight enforcement patrols were carried out by Blue Jacket, primarily targeting fisheries in the Essex rivers as well as along the North Kent Coast and Medway. During these patrols the vessel logged 35 vessel sightings (including commercial, recreational, and charter vessels) and conducted 16 inspections.

Conservation/Survey Work

During this period, a large number of surveys were carried out including oyster surveys in Essex and whelk surveys both in Kent and in Essex, both of which are detailed below. This uses up a significant amount of vessel and staff resource which is then reflected in the balance of numbers of sea-based enforcement patrols vs survey patrols. Although the vessels primary task is to undertake surveys, officers still carry out monitoring enforcement duties and can act if an offence is detected.

Dredge Survey

Tamesis spent a number of days at the beginning of September conducting the annual oyster dredge survey in the Blackwater, Crouch, and Colne. This survey consists of 100m tows at 104 sites where native oysters were found on the original survey in 2014. In addition, water samples were collected at 26 stations and temperature, oxygen and dissolved organic carbon measured at various depths. Data gathered from this survey may help to inform targeted management of oyster beds and forms the basis of a KEIFCA sponsored PhD by University of Essex student Ms. Alice Lown.

Small fish survey

The Rib from Tamesis was used for the launch and recovery of nets for a few days whilst undertaking small fish surveys in the river Medway working with the Environment Agency.

Whelk Survey

Tamesis was tasked with conducting a whelk survey in the early part of November. The aim of the survey was to quantify changes to the weight and size structure of whelks caught and retained using larger escape gaps in whelk pots and therefore estimate the economic impact to fishermen of an increase in whelk escape gap and riddle size. This involved setting multiple strings of whelk pots across the district. Each string carried 5 pots with 22mm escape gaps and 5 pots with 25mm escape gaps. Once recovered the haul from each pot was riddled through a 25mm riddle and the rejected whelks were riddled through a 22mm riddle. Weights and sizes of whelks were recorded at the different stages.

Other surveys

Whilst stationed in Ramsgate, Tamesis also facilitated the collection of 27 water samples from 9 sites across the North Kent coast for Canterbury Christ Church University. These samples are going to be analysed for the presence of micro plastics at the university.

Marine Mammal observations

Patrols have led to one off sightings of marine mammals on 5 occasions, mostly individual sightings around the Colne and Swin, but a large group of 40 seals was sighted on the Ridge banks

Maintenance

Routine maintenance was conducted on the vessels as required and monthly safety checks were carried out on schedule. Neither vessel required any major work, though a hydraulic hose to the hauler on Tamesis was replaced.

Other Information

Statistics

During this quarter, Tamesis has put to sea on 19 occasions, used 3925 litres of fuel and travelled 812 nautical miles. Blue Jacket put to sea 8 times using 632 litres of fuel to cover a patrol distance of 265 miles.

Other trips

Candidates for the post of science officer were taken to sea and assessed on Tamesis in mid-November, and BBC radio were taken aboard Tamesis for a feature on the River Medway No Take Zone.

Operations were conducted in accordance with standard operating procedures; the procedures outline safe working practices for employees and other agencies whilst working on the boat.

Invitation to Authority Members and P.R

An open invitation is extended to Authority Members to join the crew on an enforcement patrol or survey aboard the vessel.

Colm O'Laoi
Skipper & IFC Officer