



Agenda Item B8

By: Lead Scientific and Conservation Officer
To: Kent and Essex IFCA – 30 January 2018
Subject: Update and review of Strategic Evidence Plan
Classification: Unrestricted

Summary:

This report provides an update on the KEIFCA's Strategic Evidence Plan.

Recommendations:

Members are asked to **AGREE** to update the KEIFCA Strategic Evidence Plan and to run a consultation of the plan with the wider research community.

Introduction/Background:

There has been a lot of change on the science and conservation team over the last year, with Jane initially on maternity leave and then getting a job with CEFAS. This then led to the recruitment of a new lead science and conservation officer and then a subsequent recruitment to backfill the vacant science and conservation officer post. During this period, all efforts have been focused on keeping the ongoing surveys and research projects running. At the same time, the national evidence and research landscape has changed and new priorities have emerged as a response to UK exit from the EU. From the 5 February, we will be back to full staffing levels and finalising KEIFCA's Strategic Evidence Plan is a top priority.

As previously the KEIFCA annual plan contains success criteria 5 (Evidence and Science - IFCAs make the best use of evidence to deliver their objectives) which outlines the key actions, outputs and members of staff involved in delivery. Following on from last year specific detail, regrading individual projects has also been developed in the section: evaluation and schedule of planned research for 2017-2018. As with previous years the annual report is used as the vehicle to report against these actions.

Whilst the annual plans and reports give a yearly focus and update on priorities and projects, the Strategic Evidence Plan looks to focus on the longer-term objectives of the organisation. For this reason it is suggested that the document is updated with

the information below and then consulted on with the research community. Feedback on the consultation will then be given at the next Authority meeting.

Update

Over the past year KEIFCA has continued to work closely with Natural England, the Marine Management Organisation, the Environment Agency and Cefas. Staff from KEIFCA are members of a number of regional and national environmental groups, and feed directly into the IFCA Technical Advisory Group.

Future projects had been identified in the Strategic Evidence Plan in several areas of work. Progress on these projects has been assessed and can be summarised as follows:

- *European Marine Site projects*

A byelaw introducing management measures for the Margate and Long Sands SCI is with the Secretary of State for signing, with three areas due to be closed to bottom towed gear to protect the most sensitive areas of the sand banks.

Management within the Essex Estuaries SAC has been applied via a bottom trawling byelaw closing certain areas to trawling.

In 2018, a system for logging the number and frequency of enforcement patrols with European Marine Sites (EMS) will be developed. This will allow for increase understanding of the effectiveness of management measures.

- *Marine Conservation Zone projects*

The tranche 3 MCZ designations, delayed thus far, are likely to enter the consultation phase this year. KEIFCA will work closely with all stakeholders through the consultation process, and will identify knowledge gaps and options for management to maintain or recover protected features of the MCZ.

KEIFCA continues to fund a PhD student at the University of Essex, looking into the restoration of the native oyster in the Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne (BCRC) MCZ. In addition, KEIFCA continues to work closely with stakeholders through the Essex Native Oyster Restoration Initiative (ENORI), who are carrying out research projects to evaluate the viability of active management techniques within the BCRC MCZ.

The same system for logging enforcement patrols in EMS will also be applied to MCZ sites within the district.

- *Sustainable Fisheries projects*

KEIFCA is continuing the annual cockle stock assessments in the Thames Estuary. Following the testing of VMS data collection during the 2016 cockle season, this program was expanded for the 14 TECFO boats during the 2017 season. This data will be analysed to give a much clearer picture of the impacts of the cockle fishery.

The work of Dr. Hollyman on the whelk population in the KEIFCA district has provided an insight into the differences between whelks from each of the four specific whelk areas within the district. This work feeds directly into two further research projects which will take place in 2018. EMFF funding is approved for a two year study into whelk populations in the district, while funding is pending for a one year whelk genetics project to be carried out in collaboration with the University of Essex.

For finfish, KEIFCA is actively involved in a European project (SUMMARiS Interreg Project) to better understand the Thornback Ray population across the southern North Sea. KEIFCA continues to support the annual survey of small fish within the Medway Estuary MCZ, and works closely with the Environment Agency to complete this project.

- *Access to Information and Development of Evidence projects*

Ongoing training for staff in data collection, handling and analysis will occur in 2018. KEIFCA maintains a highly skilled workforce, with strength in boat and quad based surveys, along with data collection and GIS capabilities.

Recommendations:

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