



Agenda item B6

By: Assistant Chief IFCO
To: Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority – 22 May 2018
Subject: **PERMITTED COCKLE FISHERY MANAGEMENT**
Classification: Unrestricted

Summary:

This report provides a summary of the spring 2018 cockle stock assessment surveys. Resulting recommendations on the management of the 2018 permitted cockle fishery are included in this report and members are asked to review and approve this recommended management of the 2018 cockle fishery

Recommendations –

In respect of the flexible permit cockle fishery:

- (a)** The Total Allowable Catch (TAC) should be set at 535 tonnes which based upon the number of permits being applied for being 35, results in 1 trip per vessel of a maximum volume of 13.6m³.
- (b)** All areas apart from the Dengie, Buxey and Ray Sands within Area 7 to be closed to fishing
- (c)** The fishery will open on Tuesday 2nd October 2018 and will close on Thursday 4th October. Fishing will be permitted between 0900 on the Tuesday until 1200 on the Thursday.
- (d)** That the Chief IFCO be authorised, after consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairman, to implement changes to fishing controls within the limitations of the agreed TAC.

1. Permitted Cockle Fishery 2017

In May 2017, the Authority decided to open the permitted cockle fishery for the first time since 2014. Due to the high number of permit applications, which was

far in excess of any year historically, and the lack of cockles on most of the areas other than area 7, only one trip per boat was permitted.

2. Cockle Fishery Flexible Permit Byelaw

The process for the management of this fishery is that anyone wishing to apply for a permit is required to apply by 31 March in that year and all stock assessment surveys are completed before the May Authority meeting. This ensures that the Authority can be presented with a complete picture of the fishery, including the amount of stock available and the number of vessels wishing to work it.

2.1 Appropriate Assessment

The Authority is required under Regulation 48(3) of the Conservation (Natural Habitats) Regulations 1994, Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 the Authority to give notice to Natural England of intention to issue permits to fish for cockles within designated SSSI, SAC, SPA and Ramsar inter-tidal sites. The Authority is also required to submit a Habitat Regulations Assessment to Natural England which assess the impact of the fishery on protected features of European Marine Sites. This assessment includes survey data, fishery monitoring and details of mitigation implemented to ensure that there is no adverse impact upon these sites as a result of the Authority's action. A HRA has been completed on the recommended management of the 2018 fishery, i.e. that the permitted cockle fishery opens as per the recommendations, and this has been submitted to Natural England.

2.2 Number of Permit Applications

Thirty five permit applications have been received for the 2018 fishery, comprising of vessels from both the Kent and Essex district and the Eastern IFCA district.

2.3 Spring 2018 Cockle Stock Surveys

2.3.1. Method and survey area

Stock surveys of the area outside the TECFO commenced on 9th April 2018 and the main outside area beds were completed by 19th April 2018. At this time of year the cockles are coming into condition for their spring spawning following the winter dormant period.

These surveys took a total of fourteen survey days to complete using Day grabs deployed from both Tamesis and Nerissa, covering a total area of 54.5 km² (21.0 miles²) with a total of 456 grab samples being taken. The areas surveyed covered the Buxey, Ray and Dengie Sands, Minnis Bay, Leysdown and Pegwell Bay, which include all of the current main production areas within the Permitted Fishery (a chart showing the production areas is attached in Appendix A).

2.3.2. Results

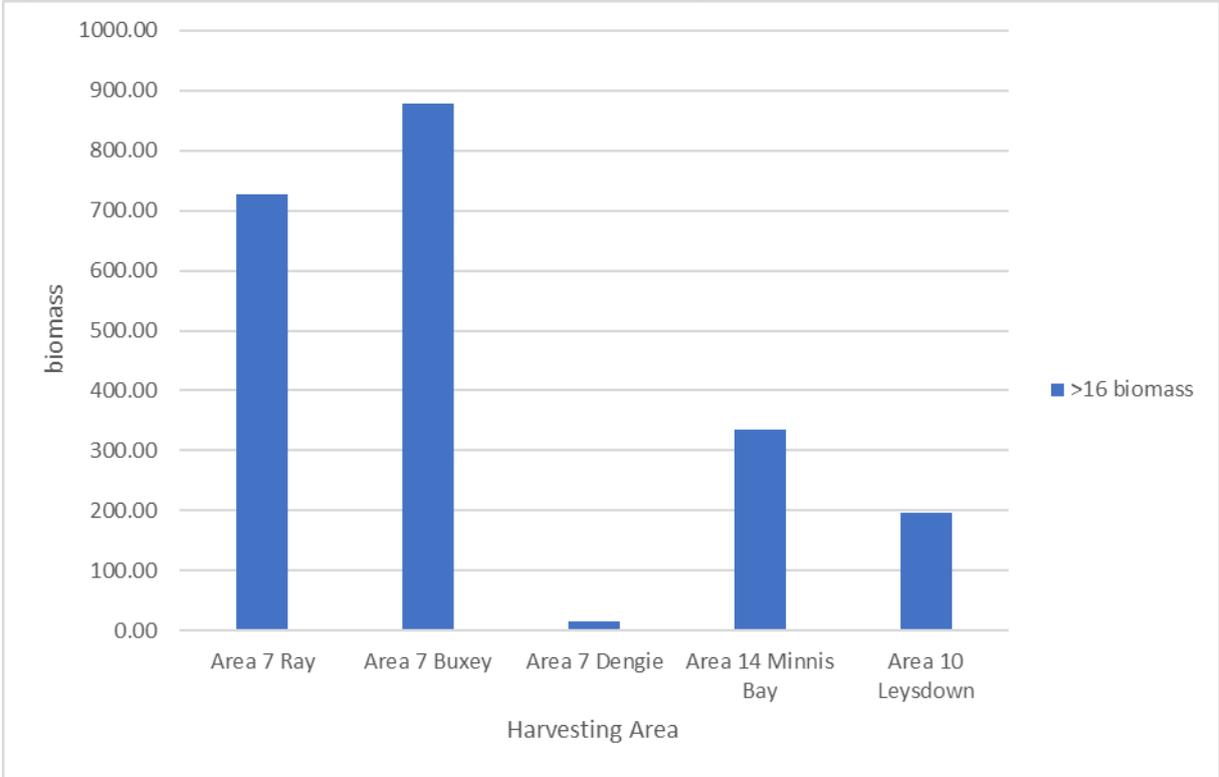
The main harvesting areas of the Permitted Fishery are in Area 7 and data from the spring 2018 survey were compared with data from recent years to analyse

trends in the cockle beds in this area. All three beds within Area 7 are showing a level of stability with the biomass (tonnage) on the sands being similar to that in 2017.

The number of >16mm cockles is also similar to last year with approximately 35% of the adult cockles having reached the 16mm required as a minimum size, with the remainder being primarily from the significant spatfall in 2016 which are <14mm and will grow on for future fisheries.

As is usual, the Buxey Sand and Ray Sand beds contain the majority of the available adult stock. Other areas in the permitted cockle fishery area have shown a slight increase in the number of adult cockles but very little is in excess of the 16mm minimum size at present.

Fig. 1: Biomass of >16mm cockles on the main harvesting areas of the Permitted Fishery



2.4 2018 Fishery Management

The survey shows that as in recent years, the Ray and Buxey Sands are the most productive beds and that the other areas contain very few cockles suitable for commercial harvesting. The recommended maximum Total Allowable Catch (TAC) of >16mm cockles that can be taken from the beds in Area 7 is 535 tonnes. This figure is greater than the 350 tonnes provided for in the Permitted Fishery Management Plan. This figure divided by the total number of vessels which have applied for a permit (35) would result in one fishing trip for each vessel.

Area 7 of the permitted cockle fishery, is located within the boundary of the Essex Estuaries SAC and the Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne Estuaries

MCZ. It contains, as well as the cockle beds, a notable Native Oyster population which is in the process of being protected by a new permit byelaw. In addition, trawling is prohibited in areas within the Essex Estuaries SAC immediately adjacent to these beds. As a result, making conservative decisions regarding this fishery would seem prudent, to try and ensure that this is a regular fishery which the industry can make informed decisions about when deciding whether to take part.

A time-limited, trip-limited fishery is a suitable approach given the large number of vessels which continue to apply for permits to access this fishery - the number of permits which have been applied for are the same as the number of vessels which took part in last year's fishery. The provisions listed below are intended to enable the fishery to operate in a time-efficient manner whilst reducing the impact of the fleet upon the ground and reducing fishing mortality as much as possible.

In 2017, 45 permits were applied for, whilst only 35 vessels took part in the fishery. This was the result of a number of vessels making an economic decision as they felt that one trip was not sufficient economic return for the investment required to take part. Thirty five vessels have applied for the 2018 fishery and it is expected that they will all take part.

Fishing allocations

The fishery will occur in the week following the last week of the TECFO 1994 cockle fishery which is provisionally set to close on 28th September 2018. The fishery will open on Tuesday 2nd October 2018 and will close on Thursday 4th October. Fishing will be permitted between 0900 on the Tuesday until 1200 on the Thursday. Vessels will be permitted to undertake one trip only.

Vessel Checks

Each vessel and its cockle gear will be cleaned of all cockle debris including the hold, deck and all spaces that may hold cockles. The pumps, pipes, dredges and riddles on each vessel would also be cleaned. This would involve washing with a fresh water pressure washer and scrubbing each part, the vessel and gear would then be allowed to dry. The vessel would then be submitted for inspection.

Vessel owners would be required to contact the KEIFCA office to book a time and date for inspection. All vessels would be inspected in the week prior to the fishery with KEIFCA officers travelling to the most recent working port of each vessel to check the vessel decks and holds are clean and where the pumps and pipes would be flushed through with sea water for an appropriate period of time.

Each vessel taking part in the fishery will be inspected against the requirements of the Flexible Permit Byelaw and the biosecurity plan. If any vessel fails, its inspection then it may not take part in the fishery. In an extreme situation, the permit holder can write to the Chairman and Vice Chairman to appeal the decision, explaining the extenuating circumstances that led to the inspection failure. In such circumstances, it would be at the Chairman and Vice Chairman's discretion for a second inspection to be undertaken. If this inspection fails an inspection certificate will not be issued and the vessel will not be allowed to enter

the fishery. If the vessel passes it will be issued with an inspection certificate. After the fishery opens officers would not be able to inspect any more vessels.

Bag inspections

Any cockles which are landed to be transported outside of the KEIFCA district for processing must be landed in bags. The requirements for the inspection of cockle bags are prescribed within the Flexible Permit Byelaw and must either be new bags or cleaned and disinfected using a prescribed process developed in conjunction with CEFAS. The cockle bags will be inspected by the KEIFCA officer during the biosecurity inspection.

Location of vessels

KEIFCA patrol vessels will be at sea throughout the period of the fishery ensuring that vessels only fish within the open areas and to monitor damage and catch rates.

Fishing vessels will be required to give notice to the cockle line upon leaving port providing information on which area they intend to fish in, and will also be required to give notice to the cockle line two hours before landing.

2.5 Outlook for 2019 and beyond

There are large numbers of adult cockles below 16mm at some survey points in all outside areas and depending on growth rates over the next year, these cockles may be of harvestable size in 2019. Poor growth of cockle on all beds both within the TECFO and the permitted fishery in 2017 prevented these cockles reaching 16mm as expected for this year's fishery. Fishery mortality as well as winter mortality over the 2018/19 winter will be impact upon the 2019 fishery.

Financial Implications:

None identified in relation to agreed budget headings.

Recommendations –

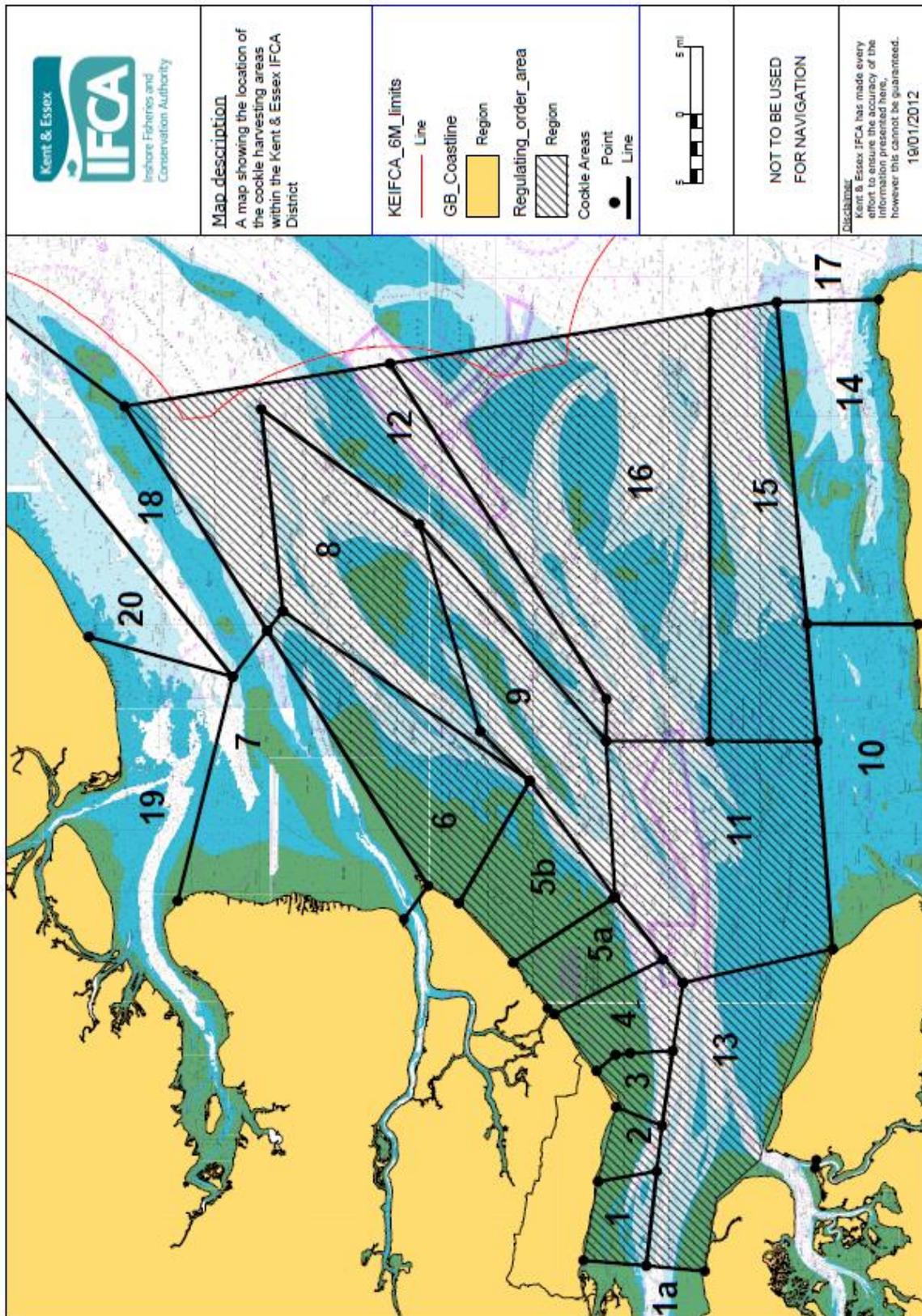
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Appendix A



A chart showing the cockle production areas within the Kent and Essex IFCA District