

## **Agenda Item - C7**

### **Lead Scientific and Conservation Officer update**

#### **Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority Quarterly report for the period January 2018 to May 2018**

### **Strategic Evidence Plan Update**

At the January 2018 Authority meeting, Members agreed to run a consultation of the strategic evidence plan with the wider research community. As a result of this, the plan has been shared with the IFCA Technical Advisory Group (TAG), and responses will be collated.

TAG comprises members of each of the ten IFCAs, along with the Marine Management Organisation, Cefas, Natural England, DEFRA, the Environment Agency and the Governments of Wales, Isle of Man, Guernsey and Jersey.

Responses to the strategic evidence plan will be brought back to the Authority at the next meeting.

### **Native Oyster Restoration Project Update**

The Native Oyster Restoration Project was a three-year project designed to look at the effects of harrowing the sea bed to promote a more favourable environment for the settling and recruitment of oyster spat within the Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne MCZ.

The process of harrowing involves dragging chain mats across the sea bed in order to remove excess mud and silt, leaving a cleaner layer of the underlying cultch. If harrowing is carried out before mature oysters in the area start to spat, the theory is that this cleaner cultch will result in better settlement.

Since the start of this project in 2015, harrowing has occurred on three separate occasions; in June of 2015, 2016 and 2017. Sidescan sonar was used to create an image of the sea bed both before and after these harrowing events which allowed seabed impacts from the harrowing to be monitored. Two sites were selected for the project, one in the River Blackwater off Mersea Island, an area of subtidal mixed sediment, and one on the Ray Sands, an area of subtidal muddy sand.

In June 2015, the initial sidescan sonar survey of the chosen sites in the Blackwater and on the Ray Sands was conducted. Sediment grabs were also taken during the

survey. These sediments grabs were sent for particle size analysis in order to ascertain the baseline sediment classification for the areas of interest. A week later the first harrowing event was carried out. Harrowing was completed by local oystermen in their own boats in an area specified by KEIFCA. Each site was harrowed for approximately 15 to 18 hours.

A second sidescan survey was completed one week after the harrowing event, with subsequent surveys at six weeks, and six months, after harrowing. The survey was repeated in 2016 and 2017, giving three harrowing events and three years of data.

Dates of surveys were as follows:

June 2015	Survey 1. Pre Harrow
July 2015	Survey 2. Post Harrow (1 week)
August 2015	Survey 3. Post Harrow (6 weeks)
February 2016	Survey 4. Post Harrow (7 months)
June 2016	Survey 5. Pre Harrow/Post Harrow (1 year)
July 2016	Survey 6. Post Harrow (1 week)
August 2016	Survey 7. Post Harrow (6 weeks)
February 2017	Survey 8. Post Harrow (7 months)
June 2017	Survey 9. Pre Harrow/Post Harrow (1 year)
July 2017	Survey 10. Post Harrow (1 week)
August 2017	Survey 11. Post Harrow (6 weeks)
February 2018	Survey 12. Post Harrow (7 months)

The February 2018 survey was the last of the twelve scheduled surveys for the project. As with all previous surveys it was carried out aboard FPV Tamesis by KEIFCA officers. The final survey also included the Essex University intern who is working with us in 2018.

Data from these twelve surveys is being analysed in order to produce a report on the effectiveness of harrowing as a tool for native oyster restoration within the BCRC MCZ. Initial findings show that harrow marks are visible in the seabed immediately after harrowing. These harrow marks are much clearer in the mixed sediment of the Blackwater than they are on the sandier Ray Sand. The harrow marks appear to be much more persistent in the Blackwater than on the Ray Sand, which is a much more exposed and dynamic site. A more in-depth analysis of the results remains to be carried out in order to produce a final report. Once this report has been finalised it will be reviewed via E-NORI and the IFCA Technical Advisory Group (TAG), before presentation to the Authority.

## **Tranche 1 MCZ Assessment Update**

Under the Marine and Coastal Access Act (2009) KEIFCA is required to consider the effects of fishing activities within MCZs. Where fishing activity is considered to have a significant risk of hindering the conservation objectives of an MCZ, KEIFCA is required to introduce management to reduce this impact. As a result, KEIFCA has been assessing the activities within MCZs in the district, along with management measures currently in place, to understand the impacts of our management measures on conservation objectives

The assessment process for the four Tranche 1 (T1) MCZs within the KEIFCA district is ongoing. Following the latest round of communication and meetings with Natural England progress has been made on three remaining assessments which have not yet been approved.

Individual updates for the T1 MCZs are as follows:

### Folkestone Pomerania MCZ

This assessment was submitted and formally approved by Natural England in 2017.

### Thanet Coast MCZ

This assessment has been agreed in principle with Natural England. Final revisions to the text have been completed and only Geographical Information Systems (GIS) work remains to produce the appropriate figures for the assessment. This will be formally submitted to Natural England for approval by 25 May 2018.

### Medway Estuary MCZ

This assessment has been agreed in principle with Natural England. Final revisions are ongoing, and GIS work remains to produce the appropriate figures for the assessment. This should be formally submitted to Natural England for approval by 29 June 2018.

### Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne MCZ

This assessment is ongoing and will require further edits. KEIFCA will continue discussions with Natural England and seek to have an agreement in principle before official submission.

## **Summary**

Much of the discussion around the T1 MCZ assessments has related to how KEIFCA will record their monitoring of these MCZs. While KEIFCA has a huge amount of data showing boat patrols within MPAs, these are not easily accessible and don't necessarily give an easily interpreted picture. Natural England has agreed that a simplified log of patrols within the MCZs can be produced.

Staffing levels at both Natural England and KEIFCA over the past year have resulted in the timescale for these assessments slipping. With KEIFCA scientific staff recruitment resulting in greater capability, there is now a renewed push from both Natural England and the IFCA to get these assessments submitted and approved.

Rob Dyer  
Lead Scientific and Conservation Officer