

By: Assistant Chief IFCO

To: Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority – 14 September 2018

Subject: **Cockle Fishery update**

Classification Unrestricted

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**Summary:**

This report provides Members with an update on the 2018 Thames Estuary cockle fishery and the progress made towards opening the Permitted Cockle Fishery

**Recommendations:**

This report is for comment only.

**Background:**

The TECFO hydraulic dredge cockle fishery was opened by the Authority on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2018. Prior to the opening of the fishery, yield checks from each area were carried out by a vessel, processor and a KEIFCA officer. The proceeds from the sale of the cockles collected for yield checks were donated by the processor and fishermen to the Fishermen’s Mission. These yield checks agreed with the results of the Authority survey with good catch rates resulting from the high numbers of individual cockles on the ground but with slightly below average yields.

Catch rates have been excellent throughout the season, with some vessels completing their trips in around 1 hour at the start of the season up to around 3 hours at present, yields however have varied significantly throughout the season. Catches of the maximum of 13.6 m<sup>3</sup> or approximately 11 tonnes were made by most vessels each trip and weather conditions have been good, although the extreme hot weather and lack of rainfall may have inhibited growth during the middle of the season. There are reports from the industry regarding the presence of cockle spat (young cockles) on the grounds in significant numbers. The presence and extent of spat will be confirmed during the September surveys.

## **Total Allowable Catch for 2018 TECFO Fishery**

It was agreed at the last meeting that a provisional total allowable catch (TAC) of 5390 tonnes would be allocated and that any increases or changes would be subject to survey results and discussions with license holders showing that stocks were available in other areas and that growth was good.

At the start of the season, vessels began working in Area 1, Marsh End. Catches in this area were generally good and the ground continued to support the fleet for several weeks. During July, another quantity of cockles was found in Area 8, East Barrow Sand. Both of these sites were producing cockles of better quality than the main beds of Area 4, 5 and 6. The main beds started to be fished in early July with catch rates remaining high.

The allocation of fishing trips has changed since that agreed by the Authority, as a result of discussions with the industry and as a result of the very good catch rates and numbers of young cockles being found. On 29<sup>th</sup> June 2018, following this process and in discussion with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of KEIFCA, the number of trips was increased from 35 to 40 giving a total TAC of 6160 tonnes.

On 20<sup>th</sup> August 2018, a letter was received from the cockle industry requesting an additional three trips, allowing the vessels to complete three trips per week to the end of the season. Following discussion with licence holders, the Chairman and the Vice Chairman this was approved as three additional trips with one being taken in area 6, this will increase the total number of trips to 43 (6622 tonnes).

Additional damage rate and catch rate checks are being carried out by officers. The cockle fishing season is due to end on 28<sup>th</sup> September in order to allow the opening of the permitted cockle fishery outside of the TECFO the following week.

### **Specified Landings per Specified Fishing Period**

17 <sup>th</sup> June – 28 <sup>th</sup> June (2 weeks)	2 specified landings per period
1 <sup>st</sup> July – 7 <sup>th</sup> September (10 weeks)	3 specified landings per period
10 <sup>th</sup> September – 14 <sup>th</sup> September (1 week)	3 specified landings per period (with 1 trip in area 6)
17 <sup>th</sup> September – 28 <sup>th</sup> September (2 weeks)	3 specified landings per period

## **Flexible Permit Byelaw Cockle Fishery**

As approved at the last Authority meeting, the outside cockle fishery is to open this year at the start of October. KEIFCA officers have been working closely with industry to ensure it runs smoothly. Officers went up to the Wash in August to carry out some preliminary checks on gear, prior to the full biosecurity checks in September. Full biosecurity checks for all vessels will be completed by the end of September, with most been completed between 24<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>, prior to vessels travelling to the District ahead of the fishery.

Officers have received several telephone calls from fishermen based in the Wash, expressing their frustration over only being permitted to undertake 1 trip within the fishery, stating that it makes it financially unviable. Those individuals who have called have been asked to put their concerns in writing ahead of this Authority meeting, however at the time of writing none have been received.

The Authority is asked to **NOTE** the actions listed above and provide **COMMENT**.