

Agenda Item - C7

Lead Scientific and Conservation Officer update

Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

Quarterly report for the period May to August 2018

There have been many continuing and developing project since the last Authority meeting in May. These can be broken down into four groups:

- Marine Protected Areas
- KEIFCA projects
- External Collaborations
- Staffing/Training

Marine Protected Areas

The Tranche 3 Marine Conservation Zone (MCA) proposals were finally released. Most significantly, there was no proposal for either a Hythe Bay MCZ or a Rye Bay MCZ. With both sites promising to be highly contentious had they been proposed, this should alleviate some pressure in the coming months as we expected some intensive work to impact us.

T3 sites within our district which have been proposed are: Swanscombe MCZ, a small site up stream in the Thames (near the Dartford Bridge), Goodwin Sands MCZ, and a thin sliver of Foreland MCZ. T3 additions to T1 and T2 MCZs see smelt added as a feature of the Medway Estuary MCZ, a second species of stalked jellyfish added to Thanet Coast MCZ and *Sabellaria* added as a feature of Dover to Deal MCZ.

Discussions with Natural England are ongoing regarding the MCZ assessments for all the MCZs within the KEIFCA district. This process has been hampered by staffing changes both at NE and at KEIFCA.

KEIFCA Projects

The EMFF funded whelk population study has now been underway for 8 months. We continue to receive samples from fishermen in both Whitstable and Brightlingsea, which provide us an insight into the whelks of areas 1 and 2 of our own administrative fishing areas. Samples for July and August were collected from both

Tamesis and Nerissa, as the commercial fishermen do not pot for whelks during these months. September will see the recommencement of sampling from the fishing boats.

Processing of these whelk samples is an ongoing activity and has been carried out by both KEIFCA officers and an intern from Essex University. EMFF require a mid-project report which will start to be collated in January 2019, once we have a full 12 months of data to analyse.

KEIFCA now owns a prototype whelk riddle which has been delivered and set up. Early testing has highlighted a few concerns which are currently being addressed with the manufacturer. There are promising signs that, once set up, this riddle will allow us to address enforcement issues in a much more robust and efficient fashion. Following initial adjustments, we intend to monitor the reliability and reproducibility of riddling results before releasing the riddle for wider field testing.

The Medway small fish surveys were once again completed in May/June with the input of several KEIFCA officers. All officers provide essential support for this long term data set which is managed by the Environment Agency.

External Collaborations

KEIFCA contribute to the Essex Native Oyster Restoration Initiative (ENORI) in addition to all the work that has gone into the oyster permit fishery byelaw over the past two years. Within ENORI, projects are developing in order to explore restoration options within a specified area in the River Blackwater. One of these projects was due to result in the laying of cultch with the restoration box to improve chances of successful spatfall. While all sides were keen to see this project started this summer in time to catch the oyster spatting, licensing issues from the MMO have meant that this years opportunity has been missed. We hope to be in a position to proceed in 2019.

KEIFCA continues to develop a close working relationship with Essex University. Officers have presented to both the 2nd and 3rd year undergraduate classes and we maintain ties through a PhD project on oysters and have two MSc projects currently advertised for oyster and whelk based research.

In addition, Essex University and the Essex Wildlife Trust have both expressed an interest in starting a series of juvenile fish surveys in the Essex Estuaries. Officers have trained Essex University students in the use of beach seine nets and have attended workshops to demonstrate the practicalities of small fish surveying. Particular interest is being given to juvenile bass and their use of saltmarsh habitat on the Essex coast.

KEIFCA and Cefas are also collaborating on bass projects along the East coast. A bass survey within the Thames, Medway, Swale, Crouch, Roach, Blackwater and Colne has been planned in order to assess population size and composition. Additionally, Cefas, with the assistance of KEIFCA are looking to enhance industry engagement with a wider ranging project to monitor bass stocks down the whole East coast of the UK.

Staffing/Training

KEIFCA is in the middle of the recruitment process for a new junior scientific officer. This new role will see a slight change from the old role in that we are specifically looking for GIS capability. GIS has been highlighted as a key area to reinforce, and the intention is that this will be achieved with the new recruit. GIS training has been booked for late 2018.

July saw the end of an initial trial of the Essex University intern programme. Our first intern started with us in January and worked on the EMFF whelk project. The intention is to bring a second intern aboard to continue that processing work.

Rob Dyer
Lead Scientific and Conservation Officer