

From: Lead Scientific and Conservation Officer, **KEIFCA**

To: Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority – 30 November 2018

Subject: Evaluation and schedule of planned research for 2019/20

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Summary:

This report details the scientific/research projects (both ongoing and new) for KEIFCA to undertake in the financial year 2019/20. This is a response to member comments from the 14 September 2018 meeting.

Recommendation(s):

1. The Authority is asked to approve the planned research for 2019/20

At the Authority meeting on 14 September 2018 Members resolved that a paper should be produced detailing the projects being considered by the IFCA. This paper should detail information for Members on each project for the coming financial year. The 2019/20 schedule (Appendix 1) contains a mixture of ongoing actions along with newly planned projects. These can broadly be broken down into shellfish, finfish, marine protected areas and work feeding into the South East Marine Plan.

While this list is the current best estimate of projects which will be undertaken, it should be noted that the role of KEIFCA and the nature of our collaborative work can mean that predictions of workload up to 18 months in advance can be difficult.

Shellfish

Cockles

The TECFO and outside permit cockle fisheries will continue to be conducted as in previous years.

- Stock surveys will be conducted in the spring and autumn from Tamesis and Nerissa, along with quad bike surveys of the Maplin Sands.

The TECFO fishery will again run from June through to September/October, while a decision on the outside permit fishery will be taken following analysis of the stock survey data.

Oysters

Following the completion of the oyster surveys required for the PhD with Essex University, oyster surveying during the coming year will likely look very different to previous years. In order to support the new flexible permit byelaw for native oysters a spring survey will be conducted over a wider areas of the BCRC MCZ.

- Planning of new oyster survey with input from stakeholder groups (ENORI) and experts with prior knowledge of oyster stock surveying (DAERA, SIFCA, SxIFCA)

This input, along with a wider geographical scope, will allow KEIFCA to identify any new areas populated by native oysters that were not identified in the 2104 survey. In subsequent years we will refocus on areas where native oysters are known to be present. In this way, expanding the survey every 4 or 5 years, then targeting oyster populations, KEIFCA will be better able to identify geographical changes in oyster stocks and apply these to the byelaw management plan.

- Development of a Habitats Regulations Assessment for the oyster fishery flexible permit byelaw.

In the same way that an HRA is produced annually for the cockle fishery, this is a requirement for the oyster fishery flexible permit byelaw, as the activity will take place within the Essex Estuaries SAC.

- Development of an 'Oyster Report'.

This will become an annual document, similar in style and content to the long running 'Cockle Report'.

2019 will see the commencement of a cultch laying experiment within the River Blackwater, run via ENORI. As an active member of ENORI, KEIFCA will continue to contribute via expert knowledge and vessel and survey back up during this work.

2019 will see the publication of the PhD thesis which has been in progress for the past three years. Outcomes from this project will greatly improve our understanding of the native oyster stocks and will directly feed into future oyster management. A stock calculation method from the survey data will provide us with an annual insight into population trends within the BCRC MCZ.

Essex University has now twice advertised the Oyster Stock Modelling MSD which KEIFCA and Natural England are funding however have had no applicants. Discussions are underway with Natural England and Essex University as to the way forward. Once a decision has been made on a potential change of scope and a candidate is identified for this project KEIFCA will provide supervision and will benefit from possible population modelling outcomes.

Whelks

The EMFF funded whelk population study will continue throughout 2019, with the last round of monthly samples being delivered in December.

- Monthly samples are being provided from Whitstable on the Kent coast and Brightlingsea on the Essex coast.

- Processing of whelk samples from the Kent coast will remain a priority.
- An interim report must be provided to EMFF by mid 2019.

A candidate for the Whelk Genetics MSD project has been identified and will be working at Essex University in 2019. This individual has a background in mollusc genetics and looks to be ideal for Essex University and KEIFCA. KEIFCA will work closely with the University to supervise this project to its conclusion. The resulting data from this MSD will provide a sound evidence base and feed in to future whelk management decisions within the district.

The whelk riddle that KEIFCA purchased in 2018 will be the focus of a testing and commissioning project in 2019. By proving the riddle to be an accurate and consistent method of grading whelks KEIFCA will have a quick and efficient enforcement tool for the whelk fishery. Additionally, a project to explore the potential for upgrading the riddle to allow for data to be collected from retained or discarded whelks is being considered. Whelk management within the district could be improved if KEIFCA were able to better understand the population dynamics of those whelks which were discarded from a riddle. Video data collection from a discard chute may be an option for obtaining this information.

Finfish

Juvenile Fish Surveys

The longstanding fish surveys in the River Medway will continue in collaboration with the Environment Agency. These continue to provide information for a long term data set. This work would not be possible for either the Environment Agency, or KEIFCA, to conduct alone, and the longstanding relationship between the two organisations continues to be a beneficial one.

On the Essex coast a new multi organisation collaboration is beginning to blossom as KEIFCA works with Essex Wildlife Trust and Essex University to conduct juvenile fish surveys. Early work has focussed on the River Colne, but the Blackwater and the Crouch are being proposed for survey work during 2019.

SUMARiS Skates and Rays Project

KEIFCA will continue its contribution to the Interreg SUMARiS project; undertaking surveys at sea with fishermen, helping achieve better skates and ray species identification and hosting a meeting with our European partner organisations. Through this work and working with French and Belgium partners the project hopes to address data deficiencies in skate and ray stock management and develop new management options.

Pre Recruitment Bass Surveys

Bass continues to be a vitally important species within the KEIFCA district, being targeted by both the commercial and recreational sectors. KEIFCA is working closely with Cefas on a variety of bass related projects to support measures to better understand and manage bass stocks. Surveys will be conducted across the district in late 2018, with a hope that future years will see repeats of this work. KEIFCA will continue to contribute to the

EMFF funded Cefas project to develop regional bass management measures.

Marine Protected Areas

KEIFCA will continue to assess fisheries impacts within MPAs in the district. Dialogue with Natural England is ongoing, and the relationship developed during the T1 and T2 MCZ process will continue to develop as we navigate the T3 MCZ designations in 2019. The MPA Compliance Officer at KEIFCA continues to work closely with the Lead Scientific Officer to identify areas of particular importance/interest within our MPAs, and also to better highlight the effort that KEIFCA puts into the enforcement of MPA related byelaws.

South East Marine Plan

Working with local fishermen KEIFCA officers have engaged with the MMO planning team in developing the South Eastern Marine Plan. Following this workstream key actions have emerged relating to developing better data layers for essential fish habitat, exploring the opportunities of Cumulative Effects Assessments and exploring ways of engaging the local community and providing expert local input into the planning and licencing system. Over 2019/20 officers will look to work with partners to develop these themes and ideas, either by working on joint projects or developing projects with partners.

4. Recommendation:

1. The Authority is asked to approve the planned research for 2019/20