

Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority
Permitted Cockle Fishery Management Plan

Management principals

1. Cockle harvesting under this byelaw will be managed in line with the following management plan which is approved by Natural England as part of the Appropriate Assessment required for this fishery under the Habitats Regulations.
2. The Cockle Byelaw Management Area will be divided into Specified Harvesting areas. These will be used for survey planning, stock calculation and allocation of TAC.
3. KEIFCA will undertake a survey of cockle stocks within the Cockle Byelaw Management Area by 30 April of each year.

Criteria for opening of the fishery

4. Specified harvesting areas will be opened for harvesting within the period 1 June to 31 October, and until their allocated TAC is taken, provided that the survey shows that cockle populations meet the following criteria:
 - (a) A TAC of 30 % of the total stock biomass above minimum size of 16mm, at a density above 54 cockles/m², will yield above 350 tonnes from within that Specified Harvesting area;
 - or
 - (b) Where subject to the criteria in paragraph 5, a TAC of 30 % of the total stock biomass above minimum size of 14mm, at a density above 54 cockles/m², will yield above 350 tonnes from within that Specified Harvesting area.
5. A reduction in the cockle minimum size from 16mm to 14mm will be implemented provided the following criteria are met;
 - (a) Where cockles over one year old and between 14mm -16mm represent at least 60% of the stock and are at a stock density of above 400/m² and
 - (b) where a TAC of 30% of cockles above 14mm would yield above 350 tonnes from within that Specified Harvesting area;
 - Or
 - (c) Where cockles over two years old and above 16mm represent less than 60% of the stock and are at a stock density of above 250/m² and

(d) where a TAC of 30% of cockles above 14mm would yield above 350 tonnes from within that Specified Harvesting area;

Or

(e) Where cockles over 3 years old and above 16mm represent less than 60% of the stock and are at a stock density of above 54/m² and

(f) where a TAC of 30% of cockles above 14mm would yield above 350 tonnes from within that Specified Harvesting area.

6. A TAC will be calculated for each Specified Harvesting Area based upon the criteria in paragraphs 4 and 5. If this calculation shows that the harvesting area will potentially yield above 350 tonnes permit holders will be notified of harvesting being permitted within that Specified Harvesting Area.

Measurement of Cockle Minimum Size

7. The measurement of cockle minimum size shall be realised in that no person may remove cockles of which more than 10% by weight of a representative sample, will pass through a space of the cockle minimum size in width. A representative sample will consist of 10 samples of no less than 3 kilogrammes of cockles

Measurement of load line and cross checking

8. The hold capacity of a loose loading vessel at the load line must be cross-checked by means of transferring a loaded catch of cockles into a straight-sided container in the presence of an officer of the Authority who will measure the volume of the container.

9. The volume of cockles loaded into the container will be calculated by the Authority officer and any error in the position of the load line marking on the vessel hold will be adjusted to arrive at an approved load line.

10. As the cockles loaded into the straight-sided container will not have settled as they would have done in the hold of the vessel an additional allowance of 0.4 cubic metres will be added when crosschecking a load of 13.6 cubic metres resulting in a total container volume of 14.00 cubic metres. When crosschecking a load of 6.8 cubic metres an additional allowance of 0.2 cubic metres will be added resulting in a total container volume of 7.0 cubic metres.

11. Once the position of the hold load line has been approved it shall be permanently marked by fixing a straight shelf or ledge along two parallel sides of the hold by means of welding or other permanent means.

12. In addition, the full permitted catch of vessels loading into approved bags shall be cross-checked in a similar manner.

13. In normal circumstances these cross checks will be carried out no more than once per year or when hold/bag dimensions are changed.

Harvesting Trips

14. The number of permitted Harvesting Trips will be calculated on the basis of the number of category one and category two permits issued. These will be allocated in the ratio of 1:2 with each category one permit holder being allocated one Harvesting Trip and each category two permit holder being allocated two Harvesting Trips until the TAC is allocated.
15. A maximum of 3 Harvesting Trips will be allocated to category one permit holders and 6 Harvesting Trips to category 2 permit holders per Specified Harvesting Period
16. Permit holders will be notified of all harvesting restrictions.

Reallocation of TAC

17. As it is likely that some permit holders may not have taken their full allocation, if TAC remains per Specified Harvesting Area which is in excess of the volume that would be taken by one trip of the total number of permit holders, the remaining TAC will be re-allocated and the fishery will be re-opened for a further period.
18. Harvesting in each Specified Harvesting Area will close either after the TAC is taken, re-allocation is taken or on the 31 October, whichever is the sooner.

Maximum Permitted Catch

19. The Maximum Permitted Catch may be reduced if;
 - (a) within the whole Cackle Byelaw Management Area the total number of allocated Harvesting Trips is less than 6 per permit holder
 - or
 - (b) within a single Specified Harvesting Area where the total number of allocated Harvesting Trips within that area is less than 3 per permit holder.

Telephone Reporting

20. Notification of commencement of fishing and of notice to land shall be given by one of the following methods:
 - (a) Leaving a message on the appointed telephone line.
Tel. Number 01206 306106
 - (b) Verbal communication directly with a KEIFCA officer

Biosecurity considerations

A series of atypical cockle mortalities have occurred around the country over the last 10 years and although no single factor has been identified KEIFCA have been advised that there is a risk that a pathogen or disease is involved. Biosecurity conditions have been developed in order to mitigate the risk.

The main biosecurity risk to Thames cockles is through the introduction of cockles from areas affected by cockle mortalities.

The most effective protective measure is to ensure that no cockles or cockle debris is transported into the Thames fishery area from outside. To do this it is necessary to ensure that all vessels, cockle fishing equipment and cockle bags are clean and free of cockles. Therefore a number of biosecurity conditions have been introduced as flexible permit conditions attached to the byelaw.