

By: Lead Scientific and Conservation Officer

To: Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority –
16 September 2019

Subject: **Native Oyster Permit Fishery Byelaw Update and
Native Oyster Stakeholder Workshop**

Classification Unrestricted

Summary:

This report provides members with an update on the progress of the Native Oyster Permit Fishery Byelaw and a review of the Native Oyster stakeholder workshop held in Essex in July 2019.

Recommendations:

This report is for **noting** and **comment** only.

**1. Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne Estuaries Marine Conservation Zone
Native Oyster Flexible Permit Fishery Byelaw update**

The Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne Estuaries MCZ Flexible Permit Native Oyster Fishery Byelaw was, after several months of discussions and waiting, signed by the Minister on 1st August 2019. The byelaw is now in the process of being publicised and stakeholders being informed. In the immediate future this will not change anything on the ground as the stocks need to continue to recover prior to a fishery being opened. However, this is a really important step towards operating a sustainable, long term fishery within the MCZ.

2. Native Oyster Stakeholder Workshop

On July 11th and 12th 2019, KEIFCA hosted a native oyster workshop in Colchester with stakeholders from the local oyster industry, other IFCAs, Natural England, Essex University and the Essex Wildlife Trust.

The workshop had 3 broad aims:

- 1) To discuss the process and data needed to open the native oyster fishery in BCRC Estuaries MCZ.
- 2) To discuss and review the native oyster data collected so far.

- 3) To discuss and agree what future data needs to be collected and the procedure for collecting it.

Presentations at the workshop began with a commentary on the cultural and historical importance of the native oyster fishery in the Essex estuaries. This insight was provided by Allan Bird, a local oysterman with over 60 years of experience in the cultivation and harvesting of native oysters. This provided an important context for the discussion that followed and highlighted how engaged the local oystermen are with the work that KEIFCA has conducted in order to create the byelaw.

Delegates were then provided with a presentation on the status of the permit fishery byelaw, and the workings of the management plan which underpins the byelaw. Natural England, and representatives from Sussex and Southern IFCA's presented on the use of survey data in other districts, and how that data was used to aid management decisions in native oyster fisheries.

Dr Alice Lown presented some of the results of her thesis and the projected stock numbers within the BCRC MCZ as a result of the KEIFCA surveys between 2014-2019. KEIFCA has requested that Dr Lown present this data before the Authority at a future meeting to illustrate how the PhD funding provided by KEIFCA is producing data which directly influences the management of native oyster stocks in public grounds within the MCZ. Dr Lown has developed an Integral Projection Model which allows survey data to be converted in total numbers of oyster present in the MCZ, and total stock biomass to be estimated.

The first day of the workshop ended with some group discussions on how best to make use of the data that KEIFCA currently collects and will continue to collect in the future. Specifically, reporting of native oyster data in a coherent way to the Authority, and to the expert group responsible for making management recommendations. It was decided that an annual oyster report be drafted (in a similar vein to the annual cockle report) so that data is presented consistently, and annual trends in the oyster stock are able to be identified and communicated to all stakeholders.

Day 2 of the workshop focused on the practicalities of the KEIFCA survey. All delegates were included in group discussions on how best to conduct the oyster survey, and on options to get the local oystermen involved in the process. A commitment was made to include the oystermen, such that they were able to input their years of fishing expertise to identify potential new areas of oysters not currently included in the KEIFCA survey.

The workshop closed with a session on future work which could be conducted on native oysters in the BCRC MCZ. Dr Lown presented the preliminary results from her stock model but spoke of the limitations of the model. Large variations in stock predictions were apparent as a result of assumptions made on dredge efficiency. This is an area of work that requires more effort. Natural England have funded a small dredge efficiency project through Essex University and KEIFCA, and Dr Tom Cameron spoke of how this project would help to clarify some of the assumptions which underpin the stock model.

Outputs from the workshop include:

- a commitment from KEIFCA to host an open meeting with industry to review and discuss the survey dredge used and the set up for surveying on board Tamesis
- a commitment from KEIFCA to involve the oystermen with survey work at sea; KEIFCA will spend time at sea on industry vessels demonstrating survey techniques, and will work to allow industry to locate populations of native oysters in areas which currently are not covered by KEIFCA annual surveys

- KEIFCA will produce an annual oyster report, detailing the site, survey techniques, survey results and trends over time. KEIFCA currently has survey data dating from 2014, which will be compiled. A skeleton of this report, showing section headings and likely contents is attached as an appendix to this paper

Overall, this was a very valuable two day workshop, bringing together all stakeholders to celebrate all the hard work that has gone into native oysters over the past three years and to clarify the work that still lies ahead. Links between KEIFCA and the local oystermen, along with other stakeholders, continue to show a commitment on all sides to work towards the opening of a public fishery for native oysters within the BCRC MCZ.

Recommendations:

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