

By: Chief Fishery Officer

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

Subject: KEIFCA Whelk fishery

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Summary: Report on the work undertaken in developing an understanding of the whelk fishery

Recommendation:

1. Members are asked to **DISCUSS** and provide **COMMENT** on the next steps to be taken.
2. Members are asked to **CONFIRM** support for the PhD application

Whelk fishery update – Industry workshop

The whelk fishery is one of the fastest growing fisheries in the district and the management and enforcement of the fishery is receiving a lot of negative feedback from the local fishing industry. Primarily the issues focus on the riddling process, the accuracy of the process and the fact that the byelaw uses a riddle bar gap size rather than a minimum size or a combination of the two.

In an effort to address the strained relationship with the fishing industry KEIFCA officers were initially due to have a meeting with whelk fishermen on the 3rd September at Ramsgate. To include more fishermen, especially fishermen from Essex, the meeting has been rescheduled with the intention of holding the meeting in Mid-October. To better engage with the fishermen effort is being put into developing and sending out a questionnaire to get feedback on the fishery from the fishermen and undertaking more field trials to better understand the riddling process. It is also proposed to hold a workshop that enables more discussion and interaction than a typical meeting.

Developing a long-term approach to whelk research

Combining the need to better understand the whelk fishery and management, with the feedback from the HR review to promote and encourage the professional development of KEIFCA officers, discussion have taken place with Essex University to explore the possibility of developing a work-based PhD. A PhD package has been developed with the intention that the candidate would work for

KEIFCA as well as study. It is hoped that this approach would help form strong links between the university and KEIFCA, as well as with the fishing industry.

The focus of the PhD would be to:

- Examine the growth rates and maturation variation of the common whelk within the district. Life history and catch data will be used to develop a greater understanding of population dynamics and harvest rates, as well as the spatial distribution of whelk stocks and fisheries efforts.
- Investigate current proxies for population structure looking at diet, temperature and habitat effects on life history for the first time in gastropods using stable isotope analysis of shells and trace element analysis of statoliths, comparing this to emerging results in our lab on population genetic structure.
- Investigate the onboard fishing and sorting process to understand their effects on catch and explore the use of innovative fisheries technology in providing data on discards to develop stock models.
- An important strand of the PhD would be for it to work closely with the local Whelk industry and act as a conduit to help answer practical questions from the fishing industry and feedback the results of the research directly to the whelk fishermen.

The grant funding of this ARIES studentship would be 50% which would mean that the KEIFCA would contribute £41,338 in cash and £18,000 in kind (training, equipment and time at sea on our research vessels) over 3 years. The funding of the project would be met primarily by salary savings (the Scientific and Conservation Officer/IFCO post would go from full-time to part time) and if required extra money could come from the research fund. We are also looking at possible KCC training funds as another source of funding. Whilst we are very excited about this project it is still at the application phase and will be assessed against other applications to the ARIES fund.

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