



SUMMARY OF WHELK STAKEHOLDER MEETING

5th December 2019 at Royal Temple Yacht Club, Ramsgate

The fishing industry was represented by 8 whelk fishermen from 4 ports across the district: Whitstable, Ramsgate, Dungeness and Leigh-on-Sea

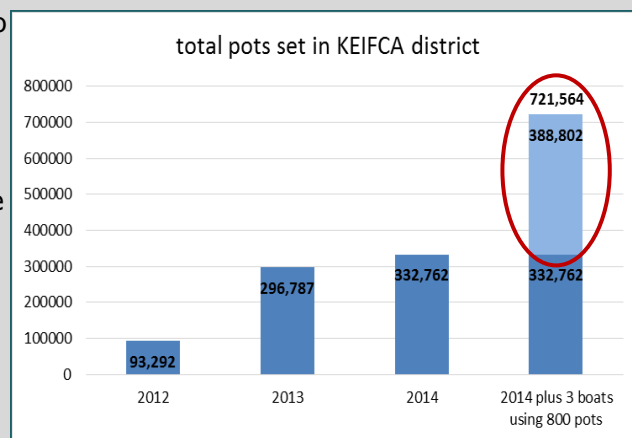
Workshop aims:

- To discuss industry concerns over inconsistencies with the riddling process
- To discuss and review future management options for the whelk fishery

1. INTRODUCTION

The KEIFCA whelk byelaw has been in place since 2011 to limit fishing effort, protect whelk stocks and prevent fishery collapse.

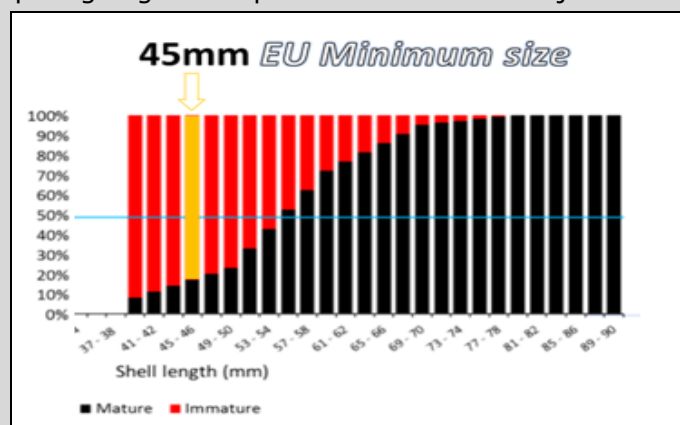
- Prior to regulation some larger boats were using up to 1200 pots; the equivalent of the combined effort of the rest of the fleet.
- By capping fishing effort, the byelaw has prevented the collapse of the fishery, which in turn has provided an economic benefit of approximately £5million to the district's fleet.
- However, recent landings data show increased fishing effort. There are significant concerns that the fishery is becoming unsustainable.
- KEIFCA want to work with the industry to make a sustainable fishery.



2. ASSESSING WHELK MATURITY & GROWTH

At 45mm (EU minimum size) less than 20% of whelks have bred and the fishery is not sustainable.

- KEIFCA have worked with Bangor & Essex Universities on various research projects regarding whelks from across the Kent and Essex district.
- Dr Phil Holyman (Bangor Uni) has developed a unique ageing technique which reveals that just 1% of 34mm whelks will have bred compared to 99% of 78mm whelks.
- Whelk shell width of 25mm equates to a shell length of 53mm.
- There is some variation across the district, but in all areas, whelks will have bred at least once by the time they are 4 years old.
- As part of a 2 year EMFF funded project KEIFCA have dissected over 10,000 whelks from across the district, each being weighed, measured and visually assessed for % maturity.



3. TESTING RIDDLE DESIGNS

The mechanical rotary riddle is more consistent than other types of riddle.

- Riddle experiments - fishermen & IFCA Officers worked together in groups testing 3 different riddles. Each group had a bag of mixed sized whelks which were riddled 3 times. The total number and weight of retained & rejected whelks were recorded, along with the number of immature and mature whelks retained & rejected. In order to show which whelks were statistically unlikely to have bred, the shells of those whelks had been painted red before the meeting.



3. TESTING RIDDLE DESIGNS (continued)

The mechanical rotary riddle is more consistent than other types of riddle.

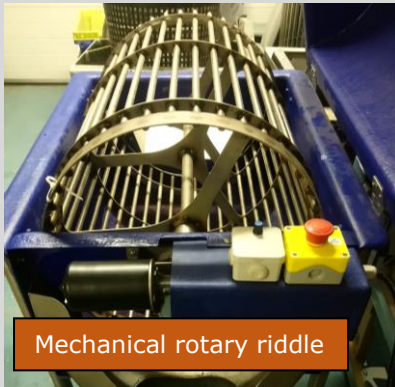
- Whelk dissection – Science Officers demonstrated to the fishermen how whelks are dissected and how gender & maturity levels are assessed.

Results & conclusions

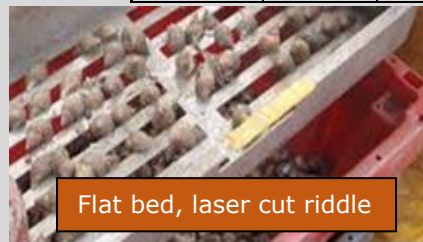
- The mechanical riddle worked quicker, most consistently retained mature whelks and had a known finish compared with the flat bed riddles.
- Riddles retained approximately 20% of immature, non-breeding whelks.
- In terms of weight and economic value, a 4 year old whelk is 3x greater than a 2 year old whelk, as shown in the table of results.

age	size	weight	value *
2 year	45mm	246g	£0.32
2.5 year	53mm	371g	£0.48
3 year	59mm	520g	£0.68
4 year	66mm	757g	£0.98

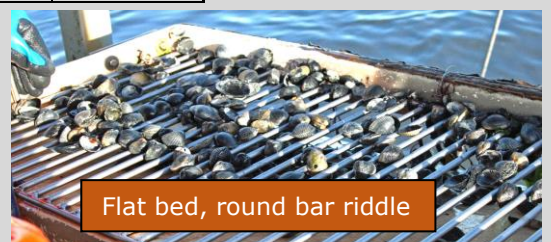
* £1.30 per kilo,
Lynn Shellfish January 2020



Mechanical rotary riddle



Flat bed, laser cut riddle



Flat bed, round bar riddle

4. GROUP DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Feedback from industry questionnaires.

- A total of 62 questionnaires were sent out, 13 responses were received, and the results were discussed by the group.

Further research is required to answer questions about the size and maturity of whelks in the district.

- Fishermen noted that there are specific areas in the district where they consistently find only small whelks and suggested further research is needed to determine whether they are nursery areas, or if whelks there are maturing at a smaller size.
- Fishermen offered to collect samples and have KEIFCA Science Officers onboard to collect samples for maturity & age testing.

ACTION: 1) KEIFCA to carry out research into known areas of small whelks

The KEIFCA byelaw requirement to riddle whelks using 25mm bar spacing is to protect the non-mature stocks, NOT to sort >45mm whelks.

- After the presentation, the group discussed "what is sizeable?". EU regulation states sizeable = >45mm. However, KEIFCA byelaw (paragraph 21) states that "All whelks within a catch must be graded for size. As part of this procedure all whelks must be passed over or through a riddle constructed of parallel bars with a minimum spacing between bars which a gauge, the size of which is set in a whelk permit, will pass through."

Consistency of landings & enforcement is important to industry & regulator

- The industry expressed its concerns over inconsistencies when riddling at sea in all weather conditions, often single-handed vs 2 or more Fishery Officers riddling on quayside.
- The industry believed an improved, consistent riddle design would be the foundation to successfully protect fishermen and provide IFCA with fair and even management.
- The introduction of a minimum length measurement was discussed, as it is easier to be consistent measuring length than width.
- The Industry suggested a potential increase in MLS, but with a tolerance.
- The Industry was urged to form a whelk association.

ACTION: 1) KEIFCA to consider introducing a minimum shell length

2) Industry to form a whelk association to work with KEIFCA to design an improved riddle suitable for all whelk vessels