

By: Chief Fishery Officer

To: Kent & Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority
– 16 September 2020

Subject: **Whelk fishery update paper**

Classification Unrestricted

Summary:

This paper updates Members on the work undertaken by officers in respect of the whelk fishery and following the approval of the Emergency Whelk Minimum Size Byelaw in January 2020 .

Recommendations:

This report is for **COMMENT** and **NOTING**.

Issuing 2020/21 whelk permits

As the serious financial impact of the crisis became apparent, the decision was taken in mid-March to try to ease some of the burden on the fishing industry by freezing the current whelk permits (2019/2020) and their payments on a rolling 1-month basis.

As the world is slowly getting back to a new normal there is an imperative to issue the necessary 2020/21 permits as this is the primary tool of management for the whelk fishery in our district. As described in our letter to the industry we would give 1 month's notice and would thus require all fishing operations that needed a permit to have a 2020/21 permit by the 16th October.

Initial feedback from the emergency byelaw introduction

Following the introduction of the emergency whelk minimum size byelaw, officers were tasked to conduct whelk landing inspections, introduce the industry to new procedures and gather data on compliance under current whelk fishing practises.

Given some of the concerns from the industry, officers started the inspection process days after the byelaw was made with the intention to run through the inspection with permit holders, give advice and return for a further inspection within a few trips to then make sure the vessel was compliant, allowing time for non-compliant vessels to try new sorting or riddling methods so they could become compliant when next inspected.

Unfortunately, the COVID 19 pandemic stopped this process and on our return to undertaking whelk inspections we prioritised vessels that had not been inspected so that data could be brought to this Authority meeting. Our next step will be to go back to the vessels that did not pass and inspect them again, giving them feedback as to the best practices that are used on vessels that have passed with very low percentages.

Twelve inspections were carried out between February and August 2020 from vessels across the district, with further inspection data still being processed from Folkestone. Results showed that three quarters of vessels (nine out of twelve) passed with less than 5% of whelks below 53mm on first inspection, and moreover a third of all vessels (four) passed with less than 1% of whelks below 53mm. Appendix 1 gives a detailed officer report of the inspections, the results and the proposed next steps. From discussions with our Lead Compliance Officer the Dungeness vessels that had expressed significant concerns at the January meeting are now using mechanical riddles passing their inspection and were well under the 5% tolerance.

Next steps and making a permanent byelaw

Although the initial inspection programme has detected a high level of compliance among the whelk fleet, it also identified which permit holders failed to pass the test and we need to work with them to improve their sorting process so that they can reliably pass in the future. As a next step, we need to gather further data with a second round of inspections of all vessels to verify our initial results, identify reasons for failure and provide advice to skippers based on best practise. In particular we need to engage with fishermen that were significantly over the 5% tolerance, giving them an opportunity to demonstrate what steps they have taken to adjust their fishing practises in order to comply. A key aspect of this will be to encourage all whelk fishermen to use 53mm stop-go gauges to check their own catch on board.

At the November 2020 Authority meeting we are aiming to bring an updated version of the KEIFCA Whelk Permit Fishery byelaw that would incorporate the emergency byelaw wording for scrutiny by the Authority. The aim would be to make any amendments from this meeting and to make the updated KEIFCA Whelk Permit Fishery byelaw at the January 2021 Authority meeting.

Recommendations:

Members are asked to **COMMENT** and **NOTE** this report