

Agenda Item - C3

Report on the patrol vessels 'Tamesis' and 'FPV Vigilant' Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority Report for the period September – November 2020

Vessel priorities:

- Monitor areas closed under Cockle Permit Byelaw
- Monitor activity during Permit Cockle fishery
- Monitor TECFO areas for compliance with regulations
- Patrol district boundary for incursions by oversize or foreign vessels
- Area 7 Cockle & Clam survey
- MCZ oyster survey in association with industry representatives
- Conduct EU Exit exercises with MMO & UK Coastguard
- Patrol areas closed for bottom trawling under Essex Estuaries byelaw
- Record data of all vessel sightings
- Record data of all static fishing gears (fixed nets and pots)
- Input key enforcement information into national fisheries enforcement database (MCSS)
- Inspect pots and traps for compliance with KEIFCA byelaws
- Inspect recreational angling vessels to ensure compliance with regulations
- Vessel Maintenance

Fisheries Enforcement

The patrol vessels are traditionally busy into the autumn with the ongoing Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery running through September and into October, and this year was no different. This was followed by the Permit Fishery, and in addition a significant priority throughout the period was the ongoing significant bycatch of Bass by commercial vessels. In 2020 all this was occurring against a backdrop of a country gripped by the Covid-19 pandemic.

KEIFCA patrol activity was not unaffected by the pandemic with a greater emphasis on Covid secure non-boarding inspections, particularly with the introduction of the second lockdown. The majority of sea patrols were also conducted from FPV Vigilant which was deemed to be the safest environment for the officers and public with regards social distancing and being outdoors. Patrols in this period covered the Thames to Dartford Creek, The Medway, Swale, Stour and Orwell, and the Essex rivers as well as the usual areas off the coast of Essex, and the 6-mile limit. In the September to November period, officers logged 88 vessels, of which 7 were charter recreational vessels, and 11 recreational anglers. Non-boarding inspections were conducted on 20 commercial vessels, 1 charter recreational angler, and 5 recreational angling vessels, the latter to ensure all were aware of, and compliant with, landing restrictions on bass and the new minimum size emergency byelaw.

One full boarding inspection was conducted on a commercial fishing vessel, which was found to be compliant with regulations.

The patrol vessels also recorded gear sightings on 4 occasions, with gear being inspected on 2 of these. One offence notice was attached for gear not being clearly marked.

Conservation/Survey Work

Surveys

Throughout the year planned survey work on Tamesis was particularly impacted by the pandemic, as the crewing requirements for the planned survey work were not compatible with the ability to maintain social distancing. Protocols and procedures were developed to allow the vessel to recommence surveys, though with reduced crew. A cockle and clam survey was planned and commenced on the Buxey, Ray, and Dengie sands following reports from industry after the closure of the permit fishery. This survey is ongoing with some planned days cancelled due to adverse weather conditions, but will resume when weather and tidal conditions allow. An oyster survey that was due to take place with members of the industry has been postponed until the spring due to Covid-19 restrictions.

Marine Mammal observations

Marine mammals were logged on eleven occasions with individual seal sightings in the Blackwater and on the Dengie, as well as further offshore in the Barrow Deep and Kings Channel. A large group of seals comprising a mix of adults and juveniles was also observed at low tide on the Buxey sands.

Maintenance

Routine maintenance was conducted on the vessels as required and monthly safety checks were carried out on schedule. FPV Vigilant had a 200-hour service on the engines with no problems reported. No unplanned major work was required on any of the vessels during this period.

Other Information

Whilst on patrol on the 6-mile limit, Tamesis was also tasked to assist MMO and UK Coastguard in an exercise in preparation for departure from the European Union on January 1st.

Statistics

During this period FPV Vigilant put to sea 20 times using 1508 litres of fuel to cover a patrol distance of 993 miles. In contrast due to aforementioned circumstances, Tamesis has only been at sea on 3 occasions covering 120 miles.

Invitation to Authority Members and P.R

An open invitation is usually extended to Authority Members to join the crew on an enforcement patrol or survey aboard the vessel, unfortunately however under circumstances due to government guidance on social distancing requirements and the size of the vessels it will not be possible to do until further notice.

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