

The Leigh Port Partnership Ltd

The Authority
Kent and Essex IFCA
Paragon House
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5th November 2021

Cockle Fishery Review

Dear Authority Members and Officers,

We would like our views of the current cockle fisheries within the Kent and Essex IFCA district taken in to account during the review period.

It is understood that under statutory legislation a full review is appropriate and needs to be undertaken, However caution is of the utmost importance to ensure that the fishery does not have significant changes just for the sake of it, It has the most financial investment and long term sustainability of all the UK cockle fishery's, and has far exceeded the European Cockle fishery's on the world stage

Section A How The Fisheries Currently Work

The Cockle industry in the Thames Estuary has survived hundreds of years before the regulating order came in to force in 1994 and managed under the previous seafisheries committee, It was Industry that approached the then seafisheries Committee to set up and manage a regulating order for the Thames cockles within the area that was formerly known as the London Port Health Jurisdiction for the processing of cockles from within the Thames. That Jurisdiction on the area for cockles to be processed within the LPHA area had since been lost and cockles could be processed in any area of the country, The area defined as to the current TECFO was used as it was a readily marked area and did not need extensive man power to re-map an area that all ready existed

The Qualifying period was between 1991 and 1992 giving anybody who was fishing from any area the opportunity to fish for cockles within the Thames to obtain a track record and be included within the TECFO, the only vessels that were seen on a regular basis were Thames based, as the other cockle vessels that had the opportunity to come and fish were content with the regulating order that had been set up in the Wash fishery or were fishing elsewhere and showed no interest in the Thames Cockle Fishery

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The Licences to fish at the the out set of the regulating order were issued to 1 Ltd company and the rest in individual names, over the next few years it was agreed by the seafisheries committee that all licences would be transferred to Ltd Companies. This in turn led to vast amounts of financial investment from the companies in to a fishery that was well managed and sustainable, ensuring the employment of the local operators and a product that was in demand thru out Europe

The CFFPB fishery in its previous format before the current flexible permit bylaw was introduced was always a casual fishery which if opened any one was able to fish this altered considerably once the CFFPB was introduced. The stock assessments that are carried out yearly to enable the fishery to be sustainable are unable to allow a successful fishery on a yearly basis due to the way the permits are issued, The only way that this fishery will ever be able to support an annual fishery is if the way the permits are allocated is changed with immediate effect and limiting the amount issued. Although this would be a mammoth task to undertake the benefits to the fishing industry in general would be of enormous benefit, it would allow new entrants in to the Industry those wishing to fish on a regular basis would be able to.

B. Regulatory Options

Does the current regulatory options actually need changing the review requires all options to be considered in a thorough review, This does not necessarily mean that it has to change, it clearly is to see that the best options are being employed for the sustainable future of the fisheries, The TECFO has clearly shown since its inception that it is the perfect tool for ensuring a well managed sustainable and environmental fishery with World wide recognition. The CFFPB fishery on balance certainly needs a different approach in to the way it is managed to allow for this fishery that spans many hundreds of square miles to be utilised to its full potential.

VMS surveillance is a must for the survival of both fishery's as it enables the management to remotely watch the activities of the vessels and therefore reducing staffing efforts and time at sea by the officers which significantly reduces the burden of extra costs on the KEIFCA

We are sure there must be other methods of seeing when actual fishing for cockles is taking place, and investment should be encouraged for any new methods available.

C. Access to the fisheries

Project Inshore, that was supported by the IFCA'S Shellfish Association of Great Britain Seafish MSC and many others, The report in to the Thames cockle fishery recommending it for MSC certification, clearly stated that this was a prime example of a fishery benefiting

from limited licences within the fishery to ensure sustainability and the ability to keep a well managed fishery with all the stock assessments taking place along with the historic

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stock assessments that had ensured the fishery was sustainable and minimum environmental impact on the fishing grounds

Clearly the TECFO has shown with historic data that limiting the access to the fishery has proved that the fishery is sustainable and the environmental impact is minimalist, it is evident to all that if this was not kept in place the fishery would not be economically viable for the local communities that heavily rely up on it. Indeed the Government levelling up fund has just announced that Southend on Sea has been awarded grant funding to cover the Port of Leigh on Sea to ensure its future for many generations, As the cockle fleet is the main users of this port it clearly shows the confidence in the fishery, and therefore begs the question as to why the access arrangements would want to be altered in any way.

THE CFFPB fishery on the other hand is in need of regular access to the fishing Industry and would benefit enormously from a different structure in the way permits are granted so as it may become a sustainable and financially viable fishery in the future to support many new generations within this fishery

D. The Economics of the cockle fisheries

Over many decades the current fleet that have operated within the TECFO through family business have invested in specific cockle dredging vessels and technology to ensure the fishery is sustainable and environmentally friendly amounting to many millions of pounds, this has not been seen in any of the other UK cockle fisheries. It supports many thousands of jobs in many sectors both in the UK and further afield in to Europe right from the catching sector to the final consumer This is very under reported and not fully understood by everyone

Processing of the cockles is a costly and precise method, the current fishing opportunities allow for batches of cockles to be processed at reasonable cost, however should any major change be brought in to the current licensing methods this would have a serious knock on effect to the costs of processing, as each batch is processed separately to comply with all legislation like first sale commitments and further batch identification to ensure the safety of the product this could easily increase production costs by another 60%, this would have to be passed on to the consumer and in effect would lower the value of the fishery considerably, and possibly taking the Industry from being a major contributor to the local and national economies to a sector that is no longer viable or able to contribute to the greater good of our prosperous country.

A fine balancing act is required to ensure the viability and it is widely believed that the current TECFO has encompassed that fully with the way it is currently managed, The review process should clearly show that the current format is the way forward for the next 30 years and that change is unnecessary just for the sake of it.

E. The Proposed Process for reviewing and developing management

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The questionnaire is often repeated in questions by virtually asking them in different formats, this could have been more clearly defined and should most certainly have encompassed more direct questions on the effects that the industry has on the wider community and business that rely on the cockle fisheries ie: all of the support industries supply and ongoing development and technology that is needed to keep all of the Industries viable and supporting the local and national economies.

The Leigh Port Partnership and the Thames Estuary Fishermans Association fully support the fishing Industry and regulatory bodies, and ask that all consultations remain fully open and transparent and include as many participants as possible to see the true picture and understanding that any review decisions are made with a full understanding of the impacts they may have on all sectors involved in an industry that has evolved from a once small time cottage industry to a major industry of World wide importance.

Yours Sincerely

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of the Chairman of the Board.

Chairman of the Board

The Leigh Port Partnership Ltd