



Agenda item B2

By: Assistant Chief IFCO
To: Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority – 12 September 2023
Subject: **TECFO 1994 Cockle Fishery Update for 2024**
Classification: Unrestricted

Summary:

This report provides members with an update on the 2024 TECFO cockle fishery

Recommendations:

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

THAMES ESTUARY COCKLE FISHERY ORDER 1994

General overview

The TECFO hydraulic dredge cockle fishery was opened by the Authority on 16 June 2024. Catch rates during the season have generally been good to very good, with good growth rates on some beds but only average or below average growth on others. Catches of the maximum of 13.6m³ or approximately 11 tonnes have been consistently landed. In general, weather has been good during the season.

The Maplin Sands struggled for catch rate and yield for the majority of the season, as a result of below average growth on those stocks, however there are good numbers of cockles on the Maplin Sands, which will maintain stocks at their current levels. Catch rates and yields were far better on the Margate Sands, East Barrow and West Barrow Sands. Catch rates on these beds were extremely good with the full load being caught in under 2 hours in some cases.

Area 15 – North Margate Sands

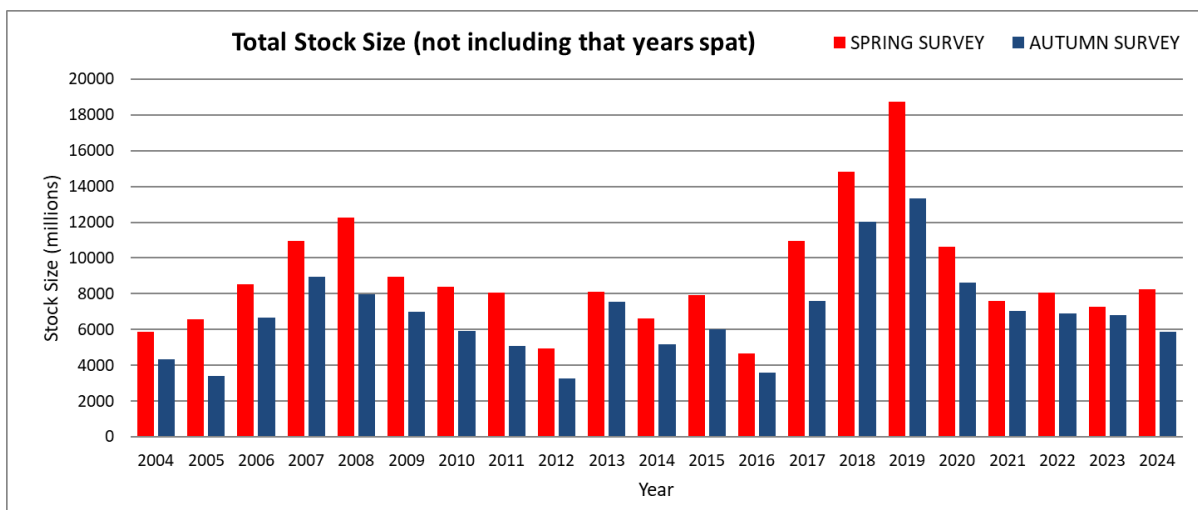
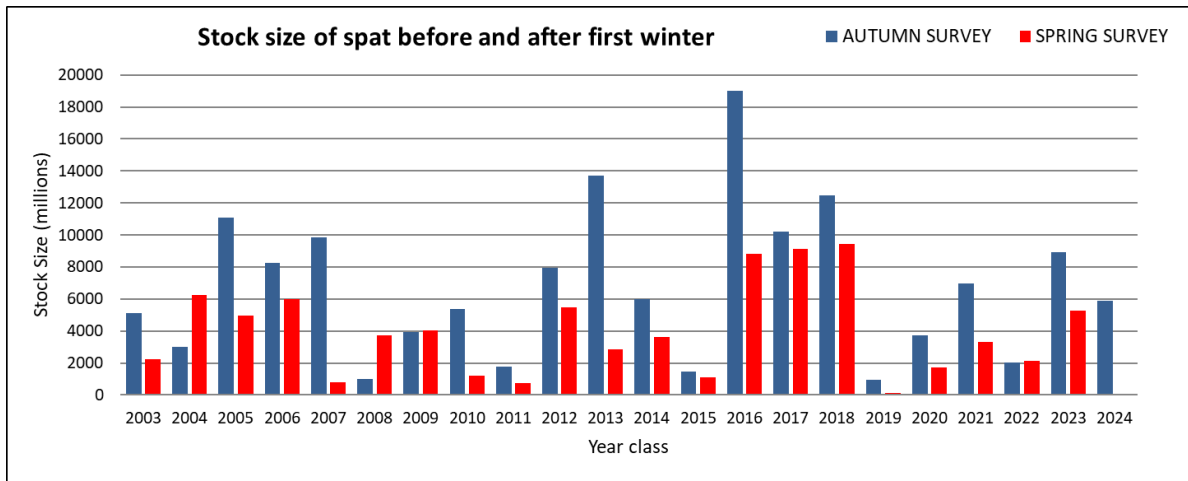
Area 15 was opened for the first two weeks of the fishery and then closed. In late August, officers conducted an additional survey on Area 15 and as a result of

these surveys, and following discussion with the Chief Officer, Chairman and Vice-Chairman, two additional trips were made available on this bed during September although no additional trips were added to the overall trip allocation.

Catch rates have again been excellent on this bed, similar to in recent years with vessels catching the maximum authorised quantity in around 2 hours. The growth on these cockles has again been very good, with the sizes of individual cockles more than doubling between the April survey and August survey. Spatfall was recorded during the August survey on this bed and young cockles were seen by the fleet, so it is hoped that this bed will continue to produce cockles moving forwards.

September surveys and outlook

The September cockle surveys took place in August this year due to tide restrictions. The current stock situation on the Maplin Sands (Area 4-6) is shown in the charts below:



The stock charts show that there has been a spatfall this year, albeit not as large as last year or as we would have hoped for but is in line with recent spatfalls since 2019.

The total stock size graph shows that the overall stock is stable and in a similar position to recent years since 2021.

Total Allowable Catch for the 2024 TECFO fishery

It was agreed at the meeting that a provisional total allowable catch (TAC) of 4620 tonnes would be allocated and that any increases or changes would be subject to survey results and discussions with licence holders regarding available stock and growth during the season.

Effort over the course of the season has been spread across the main harvesting areas. Areas 3, 4, 5 and 15 have provided some trips, but the majority of activity has been on the beds within areas 8 and 9.

Although allocations from individual beds changed slightly throughout the season, with additional trips being permitted on area 8 and area 15 reflecting the better growth on those areas and the poorer growth found on areas 4, 5 and 6, the overall trip allocation for the season did not change, with the TAC remaining at 4620 tonnes over 30 trips.

The Authority is asked to **NOTE** the report and provide **COMMENT**