

From: Assistant Chief IFCO

To: Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority –
17 September 2024

Subject: Confirmation of number of licences for TECFO 2024

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Summary: Members previously decided that issuing 15 licences would be the default number of licences issued in the first 7-year cycle of the new TECFO 2024 Regulating Order. However, it was also decided that the number of licences would only be confirmed by the Authority following the September 2024 surveys after considering stock levels.

Recommendations:

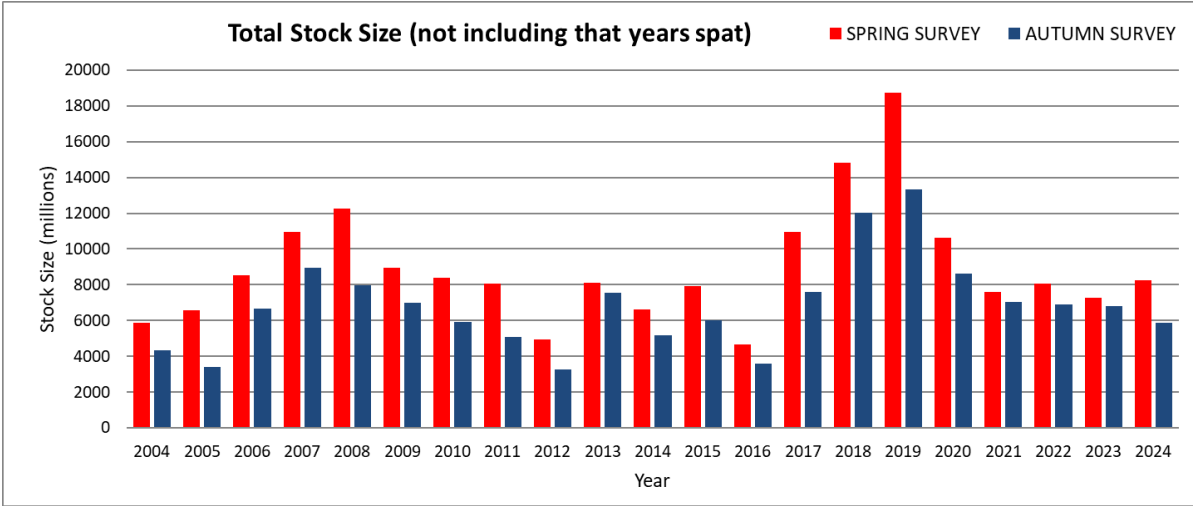
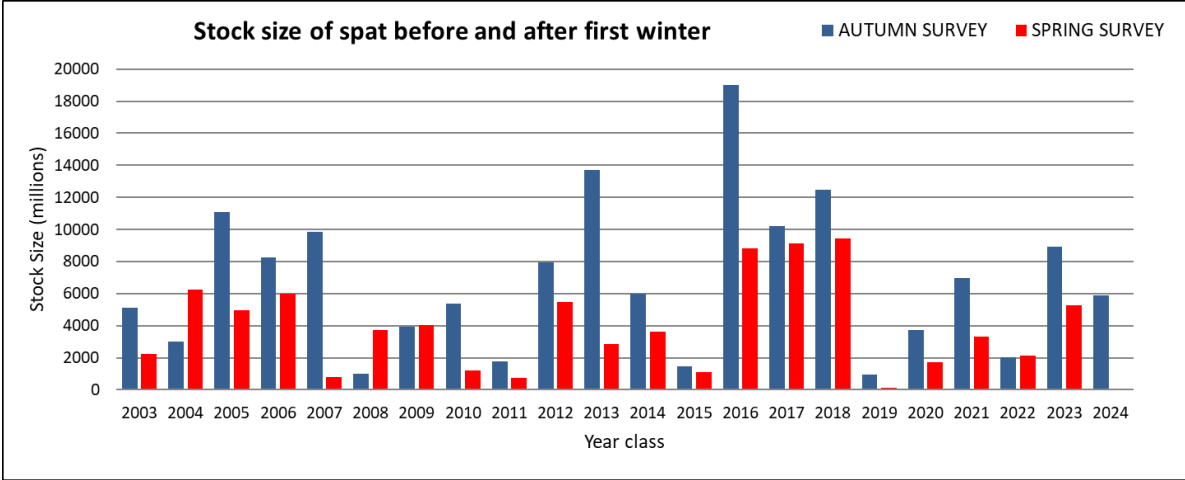
The Authority is asked to **CONFIRM** the decision made in March 2023, that the number of licences issued for the first 7 years of TECFO 2024 will be 15.

Background

At the November 2022 meeting, it was reported that the 2022 TECFO fishery had been poorer than expected due to a combination of factors including periods of extreme heat, little or no rainfall resulting in reduced runoff from land and consequently minimal nutrient release into the sea. Industry had reported very low yield, no growth and very little spawn or spat during the year. The scheduled number of trips was reduced from 38 to 35 with the TAC dropping from 5,852 tonnes to 5,390 tonnes. At the time Members were advised that the outlook for the 2023 fishery was not clear and that spatfall would be critical for 2023 and the longer term. The concerns about low stock numbers, a possible harsh winter and low 2022 spatfall were not just felt in the Thames but also in The Wash and elsewhere.

The current number of licences issued for the outgoing TECFO 1994 Regulating Order is 14. At the Authority meeting on 7 March 2023 following Consultation 3 of the Cackle Review process, members decided that issuing 15 licences would be the default number of licences issued in the first 7-year cycle of the new TECFO 2024 Regulating Order. However, it was also decided that the number of licences would only be confirmed by the Authority following the September 2024 surveys after considering stock levels.

The September 2024 surveys have now been completed, taking 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:



Since 2022, summer weather conditions have been far more favourable for the cockle stocks, with lower temperatures. The stock charts show that there have been spatfalls in both 2023 and 2024. The 2023 spatfall was a significant one being over the 10-year average, with the 2024 spatfall being lower and just below the 10-year average. This has resulted in the total stock size remaining stable as shown in the total stock size graph, and the stock has taken a significant step back from the precipice upon which it seemed to be in 2022 as a result of four years of poor spatfalls.

As a result, the recommendation is to confirm that the number of licences issued for the first 7 years of TECFO 2024 will be 15.

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