



Agenda item B4

By: Assistant Chief IFCO

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

Subject: **2024 Permit Cockle Fishery Management Update**

Classification Unrestricted

Summary:

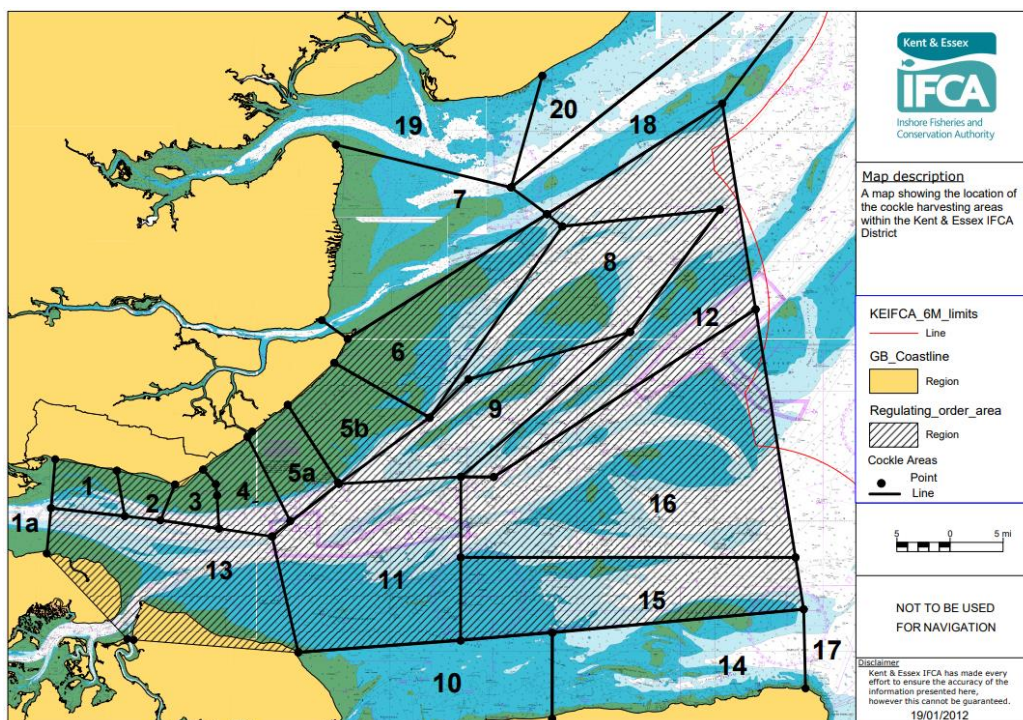
This report provides members with an update on the 2024 KEIFCA permit cockle fishery

Recommendations:

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

FLEXIBLE PERMIT BYELAW COCKLE FISHERY

At the last Authority meeting, the results of the April surveys on the Permit fishery beds were reported to Members. It was reported that in addition to the usual beds within Area 7, cockles had also been found in Area 14 on the North Kent coast. It was also reported that these areas were not classified for food health purposes, but that work was ongoing to classify this area.



Permits

At the May meeting it was reported that there were 31 permit applications received for category 2 permits. Of these 31 permit applications, 21 vessels were presented for biosecurity inspections conducted by officers and are able to take part in the fishery.

Classification of beds

Bivalve mollusc (shellfish) harvesting areas are classified according to the extent of microbial contamination as shown by monitoring of *E. coli* in shellfish flesh. Treatment processes are stipulated according to the classification status of the area. In all cases, the health standards in Annex III of EU Regulations must be met. Molluscs must not be subject to production or collected in prohibited areas. The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has statutory responsibility for ensuring that monitoring and classification programmes are in place to meet legal requirements.

This is operationalised through the local authority environmental health teams who arrange for sampling to be carried out on a regular basis for all commercial shellfish beds. Most areas of the Thames have regular sampling undertaken, but Area 14 was not classified as they have not been commercially viable under the recent management measures.

Normally this process is initiated by industry as it is not a KEIFCA statutory responsibility but in the spirit of developing the new style of cockle management and setting up a small-scale fishery, officers have been working over the past year to get beds within area 14 classified. Within Area 14, FSA And CEFAS defined two specific fishing zones, South Margate Sands and Margate Hook. South Margate Sands is now classified, work to classify Margate Hook is ongoing and is due to be completed during September, Margate Hook is therefore scheduled to

only be opened once classification is completed – most likely for the last week of the fishery.

2024 Permit Fishery Management

The permit cockle fishery opened on 1 September and is open for 4 weeks through to 27 September 2024 following the management measures agreed at the May meeting and trip allocations, both set out below:

Total Allowable Catch (TAC)

A provisional Total Allowable Catch for this year's fishery has been set at 368 tonnes within the area of the permit fishery.

Specified Landings per Specified Fishing Period

Date	Number of weeks	Number of landings per week
1 Sept – 13 Sept	2 weeks	1 landing per week of a maximum of 3.4m ³ / 125 baskets per fishing trip (approx. equivalent 3 tonnes) from the permitted fishing zone of Area 7 only.
15 Sept – 20 Sept	1 week	1 landing per week of a maximum of 3.4m ³ / 125 baskets per fishing trip (approx. equivalent 3 tonnes) from the South Margate Sand permitted fishing zone of Area 14 only.
22 Sept – 27 Sept	1 week	1 landing per week of a maximum of 3.4m ³ / 125 baskets per fishing trip (approx. equivalent 3 tonnes) from the South Margate Sand and Margate Hook permitted fishing zones of Area 14 only.

Each landing, whether it is of the maximum permitted quantity or less, will count as a specified landing. The above allocation will result in a total of 4 trips for the season. Fishing periods are between 1800 Sunday and 1200 Friday of each week.

Quantities

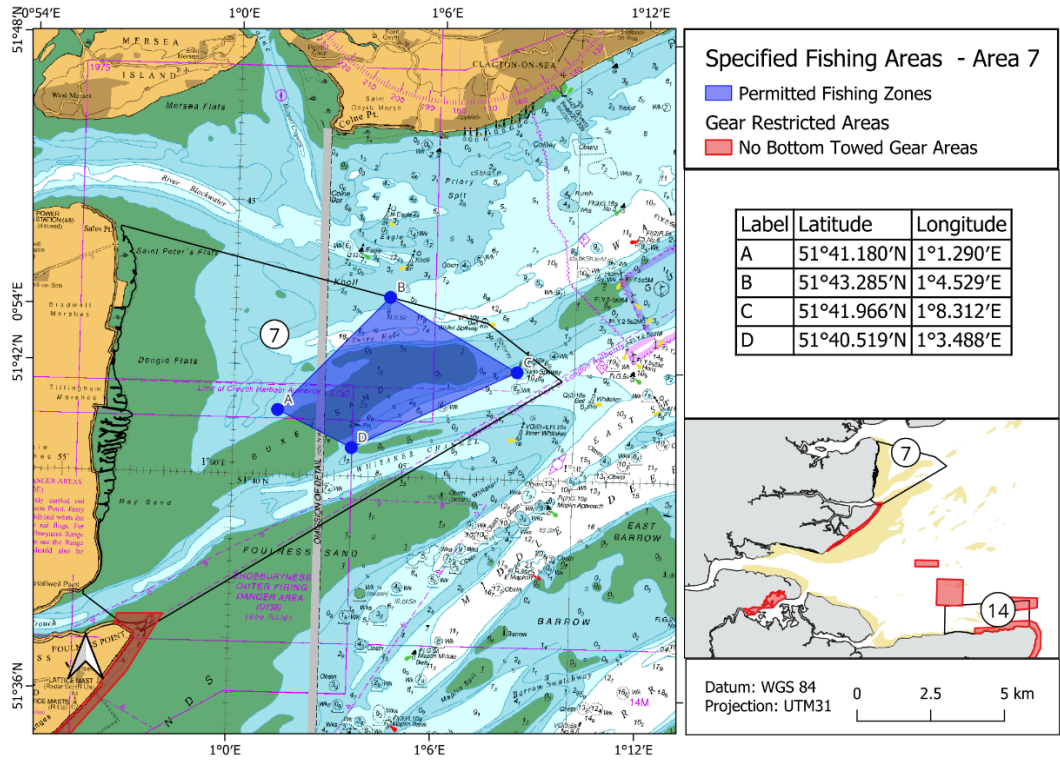
Under a category two permit, the “maximum permitted catch” of cockles is **3.4 cubic metres (approx. equivalent 3 tonnes or 3 approved bags)**.

Specified Fishing Areas/Closed Areas

During the specified fishing periods, permit holders may carry out no more than two trips in permitted fishing zone of Area 7, and no more than two trips from permitted fishing zones of Area 14. All other cockle harvesting areas are closed.

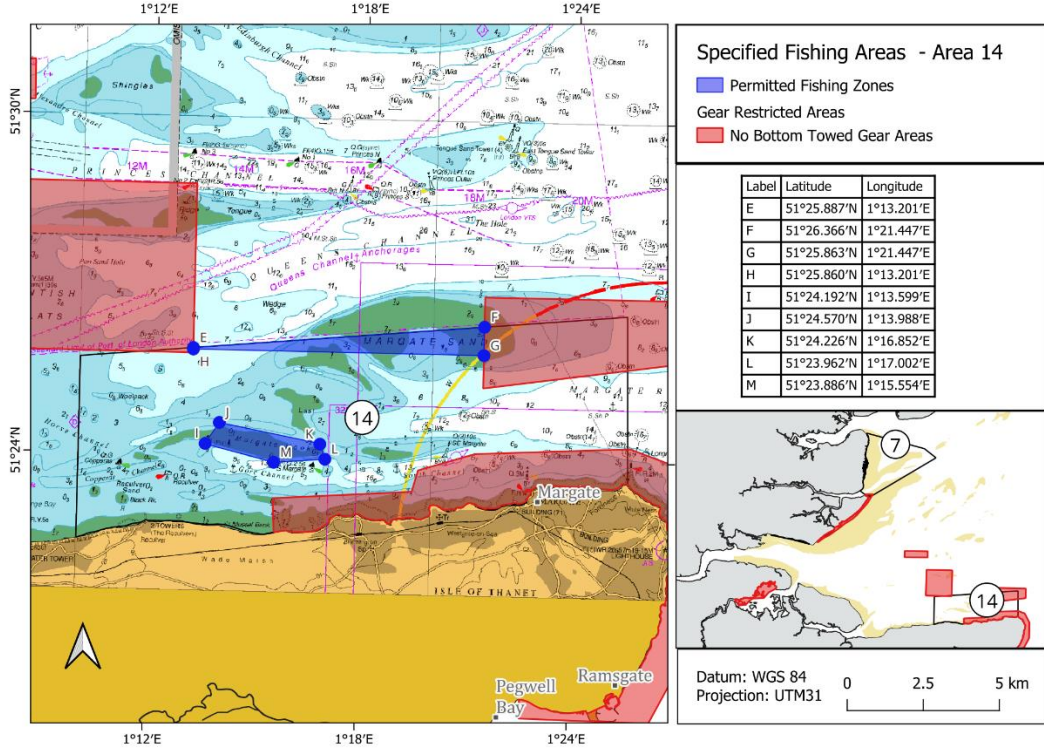
Area 7 – Buxey Sands

Area 7 fishing has been restricted to a permitted fishing zone on the North East Buxey Sands. This is due to the availability of adult cockle stock, designation of clam fishing trial areas, and HRA approval.



Area 14 – South Margate Sands and Margate Hook

Area 14 fishing has been restricted to two permitted fishing zones based on the availability of adult cockle stock, prohibited bottom towed gear areas, and FSA classification.



Officers are working hard to establish this small-scale fishery which has been borne out of the cockle review process. However, changing a fishery which has been run in a very different way for the past 20-30 years does present challenges.

Officers will provide a verbal update on catches and yields for the fishery at the meeting.

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