

Agenda Item - C3

Report on the patrol vessels 'Tamesis' and 'FPV Vigilant' Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority Report for the period November 2024 – January 2025

Vessel priorities:

- 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)

Fisheries Enforcement

This quarter is traditionally quiet with regards vessel activity in Essex due to a combination of reduced fishing effort over the Christmas period, and regular adverse weather conditions. This year has been no different in this regard, but additional factors have led to a reduction in the use of the vessels.

At the beginning of this period Tamesis was on hard standing in Suffolk Yacht Harbour for major works on the port engine, due to a burnt exhaust valve. She was relaunched at the end of November and returned to Brightlingsea and completed a limited number of patrols before the Christmas break. Vigilant too did not complete many patrols in this very short period, due to a combination of factors, including ongoing works on Tamesis, staff training and annual leave, and of course weather conditions.

When the vessels did manage to get to sea, they often found themselves in almost empty seas, as very poor catch rates meant that effort by the commercial fleet was significantly down on previous years, though whelking activity has resumed on the Maplin edge and further offshore.

Of the ten commercial vessels that were encountered, officers conducted Non Boarding Inspections (NBI) on three; two trawlers, one oyster dredger, one whelker, and one potter (who had a mere 4 crabs for 80 pots, and reported it as the worst year for fishing in his life). Officers also came across seven fleets of gear, five of which were lobster pots and appeared compliant, and one string of whelk pots with a non-compliant surface marker to which an offence notice was attached, and one fixed net off the Essex coast.

Conservation/Survey Work

Survey work is rarely planned or scheduled for this period due to among other factors, the unpredictability of weather at this time of year. This year was no exception, though it is anticipated that there will be a significant increase in the survey taskings over the coming months.

With the reported increase in seal populations and seal interactions with static gears and catches, the importance of recording marine mammal sightings by the patrol boats has taken on an even greater significance. In the few patrols conducted up to Christmas, officers logged seals almost everywhere the patrol vessels went, from Harwich down through the Wallet, into the Blackwater, out on the Eagle Bank and down in the Middle Deep and Maplin.

Maintenance

As previously mentioned, Tamesis was out of commission for major engine works with the port engine being removed to replace the valves, big end bearings, and to have the cylinder head skimmed. Routine maintenance was conducted as scheduled and the next major item is preparing the vessel for annual coding survey at the beginning of February.

FPV Vigilant was taken out of the water and stored in the yard for the Christmas period but has now been relaunched and is on the pontoon ready for deployment. The next major issue for Vigilant is her five-year survey, at which point the vessel will be subject to Workboat code 3.

Other Information

In the short run up to the Christmas break and into the New Year Tamesis did conduct four patrols (two of which were cut short due to deteriorating weather conditions) and in the course covered 112 miles. Tamesis also bunkered 646 litres of fuel in this period.

Vigilant was out on three occasions covering a patrol distance of 134 miles and taking 435 litres of fuel

Invitation to Authority Members and P.R

An open invitation is extended to Authority Members to join the crew on an enforcement patrol or survey aboard the vessel.

Colm O'Laoi
Skipper FPV Tamesis & Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Officer