

Agenda Item – C3

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

Vessel priorities:

- Monitor TECFO areas for compliance with regulations
- Collect damage rate samples from TECFO fleet
- Conduct stock assessment surveys on cockle beds
- Monitor areas closed under Cockle Permit Byelaw
- Conduct joint operations with MMO
- Patrol areas closed for bottom trawling under Essex Estuaries byelaw
- 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)
- Inspect pots and traps for compliance with KEIFCA byelaws
- Inspect recreational angling vessels to ensure compliance with regulations
- Vessel Maintenance

Fisheries Enforcement

The patrol boats are traditionally very active within the summer months, and initially this was the case for this period. Towards the height of the summer however, boat time was hampered by shore enforcement requirements, training, and crew leave. Tamesis was also unable to put to sea for a brief period as she was awaiting a replacement anchor light.

When the vessels did put to sea, the effort was targeted and planned to deliver the maximum benefit for the patrols. The earlier part of this quarter saw Vigilant engaged in routine fishery enforcement patrols, but as soon as the TECFO cockle fishery opened, she was engaged in joint operations with Nerissa to conduct boarding operations on the fishing fleet to collect the required samples of the catch for damage rate assessment. Vigilant also spent a number of days in a joint operation working with the MMO, providing vessel support for officers who were carrying out inspections across a range ports in Essex. July also saw a number of training exercises and the first mate completing the required courses to obtain the commercial endorsement for his advanced powerboat. Vigilant was not utilised in the latter part of the quarter as crew were engaged with preparations for the permit fishery and involved in the shore-based cockle survey on the Maplin Sands.

When the Cackle Permit fishery opened on 1 September, Tamesis has acted as an enforcement vessel, engaged in monitoring areas closed for fishing.

During this period officers logged forty-four fishing vessels, of which thirty-nine were commercial fishing vessels. Full boarding inspections were conducted on fourteen occasions on the TECFO fleet for the purpose of checking damage rates, to ensure cockles being returned to the sea could survive and grow. A further boarding inspection was conducted on vessel engaged in fixed netting which was found to be compliant with regulations. Non-boarding inspections were conducted on two additional commercial vessels, and two recreational angling vessels to ensure all aboard were aware of, and compliant with landing restrictions and minimum sizes. KEIFCA minimum size stickers were also given to those aboard.

During this period static fishing gear was recorded on thirteen occasions with surface markers being inspected for markings in accordance with the marking of pots and traps bylaw. All of the surface markers were found to be compliant and on one occasion officers managed to reunite some gear with the owner after it had been lost or towed by another vessel.

Conservation/Survey Work

Surveys

The survey work carried out by the vessels in general tend to occur in spring and autumn, however this period encapsulated the tail end of the cockle stock assessment survey for parts of the TECFO fishery, and Tamesis was engaged in finalising this workstream on three occasions in May.

Marine Mammal observations

Marine mammal sightings were recorded on six distinct occasions, featuring individual seal sightings in the Blackwater and the Stour rivers. A large number of seals were seen hauled out on Foulness sands with additional sightings of individuals in the Blackwater and in the Ray Sand Channel.

There was only one recorded porpoise sighting for this period, and this was spotted near the entrance to Brightlingsea.

Maintenance

Routine maintenance and servicing were conducted on the vessels as required and monthly safety checks were carried out on schedule.

Tamesis encountered a few minor problems, with the failure of a gearbox selector solenoid due to corrosion within the terminals. There was a further issue with the failure of a hydraulic hose on the gantry. This was quickly replaced, and the vessel resumed her tasking. Perhaps the most significant issue was the failure of the LED anchor light which required the mast to be removed so that a replacement (when sourced) could finally be fitted.

Vigilant required nothing more than a replacement radar reflector, and a lifebuoy which had deteriorated due to normal wear and tear, as expected on such a dynamic vessel.

Other Information

Statistics

During this period FPV Vigilant put to sea fourteen times using 1,337 litres of fuel to cover a patrol distance of 690 miles. Tamesis has been at sea on six occasions covering 151 miles and took 679 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