

Kent & Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority



Annual Report 2023-2024

www.kentandessex-ifca.gov.uk

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This report summarises the outcomes of the Annual Plan, structured in relation to progress against the five IFCA Success Criteria:

- **Success Criterion 1: Communications and engagement** - IFCA's are recognised and heard, balancing the economic needs of the fishery whilst working in partnership and engaging with stakeholders.
- **Success Criterion 2: Compliance and Enforcement** - IFCA's implement a fair, effective and proportionate enforcement regime.
- **Success Criterion 3: Management measures** - IFCA's use evidence based and appropriate measures to manage the sustainable exploitation of sea fisheries resources and deliver marine environmental protection within their districts.
- **Success Criterion 4: Governance and Training** - IFCA's have appropriate governance in place and staff are trained and professional.
- **Success Criterion 5: Evidence and Science** - IFCA's make the best use of evidence to deliver their objectives.

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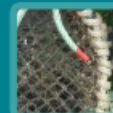
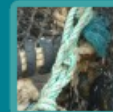
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Background

The Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 (MCAA 2009) provides a framework for managing the demands put on our seas, and aims to ensure clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas, by putting in place better systems for delivering sustainable development of the marine and coastal environment. Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (KEIFCA) and the District for which it has responsibility were established by the Secretary of State under sections 149 and 150 of MCAA 2009 and took on its full statutory role from the 1st April 2011.

The Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority has clearly defined duties to manage fisheries in a sustainable manner and conserve the wider marine environment within the coastal waters of Kent and Essex. This annual report provides information regarding how the Authority has fulfilled its duties and reports on actions taken during this year which contribute towards the Government’s Marine Policy Statement and High Level Marine Objectives.

Although the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 provides the outline of change, important detail has been added by the implementation of Orders and Defra guidance documents. These documents include the IFCA vision statement, success criteria and high level objectives, as well as key outputs and performance indicators; these have been used to assist in the development of our priorities as an organisation for 2023-2024 (see www.kentandessex-ifca.gov.uk for documentation).



Foreword

Chairman's foreword

I am delighted to present this year's Annual Report. The team has continued with its dedication and enthusiasm despite the severe headwinds created by the ongoing impact of high inflation on national and local budgets. I must thank all my fellow Authority Members for being so supportive, especially my Vice-chairman John Nicholls, who has worked tirelessly to offer me support both within our district as well as on the national stage. As ever our Authority members are the backbone of our work and I would like to welcome Mr William East and Mr Craig Collins on to our Authority.

The Fisheries Act 2020 has brought with it new and evolving approaches to inshore fisheries management, and the development of Fisheries Management Plans has provided a unique opportunity for us all to shape fisheries policy moving forward. In my experience talking and working closely with the people that are actually doing the job is the only way to achieve successful and long-lasting change. I would strongly encourage local fishers to contribute and play an active role in these groups, and I welcome the work that the Association of IFCA's (AIFCA) has initiated, with KEIFCA support, to engage fishers and IFCA members across the country in shaping the Crab and Lobster and Whelk FMPs.

After a successful 2021 spending review bid, coordinated by the AIFCA, it is fantastic to see additional funds coming into KEIFCA from central government. The additional £150,000 from Defra this year and last year has helped fund an officer to deliver our Tranche 3 Marine Conservation Zone management measures, provided extra resource for FMP engagement and marine licencing applications. Access to Defra's capital funds has also supported our Authority in committing to build a new 10.5m cabin RIB, which we hope will come into service in the summer of 2025. As always, I would also like to thank our local funding Authorities for their ongoing support and commitment to our IFCA.

Our challenges will continue as we progress into next year with the start of a new Thames Estuary Regulating Order and hopefully the development of new fisheries. Finding the right balance between sustainable economic growth and conserving and protecting key habitats and ecosystems will be difficult. However, we will continue to work with our national and local partners as well as our communities and local fishers to create a long-term sustainable future.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Lamb". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

JOHN LAMB
KEIFCA Chair

The year at a glance

KEIFCA 2023-2024



668

Fisheries inspections

6,786 million

Estimated cockles in the Thames



1,433

Cockle samples taken



236 km²

of MPAs with protective management measures

+170 km²

Proposed for next year

13 staff



895

Marine mammal sightings



3,379 km²

5,489 miles covered in patrol vessels



25

Whelk permits issued



25

Scientific Dispensations issued



69

Staff training courses completed



48

Fisheries Offences recorded



£984 K budget



214

Intelligence reports



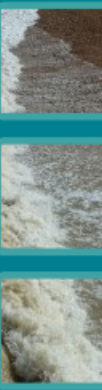
21

Authority members



807

Followers on X



Overview— 2023-2024

Change is always an underlying constant when working at sea, with ever-changing catches fluctuating with the seasons and the tides. Change has also been an underpinning theme for both national and regional fisheries management over this year. At a national level the old Common Fisheries Policy framework is starting to be replaced with species or fisheries specific Fisheries Management Plans. At our regional KEIFCA level new legislation has been submitted to DEFRA to replace the expiring Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery Order 1994. The change created by altering these underpinning structures is more likely be gradual rather than sudden, however there is no denying that we find ourselves on a new path, with new challenges.

As ever KEIFCA has been involved in delivering a wide range of one-off as well as ongoing workstreams. As normal, annual cockle surveys were completed and fed into first industry management meetings and then fishery management recommendations for the May Authority meeting. Building on feedback from the cockle management review process, the 2023 cockle permit fishery was run as a small-scale fishery with vessels landing 3 tonnes per trip rather than 12 tonnes a trip. This change in management has meant that more areas, especially on the Kent coast can be opened and included in future fisheries. This is the first step in creating more small-scale options for fishers outside the new cockle regulating order area.

Throughout the year officers have continued to work with the local whelk fishing industry, primarily out of Whitstable, to study and try and understand what caused a significant die-off event in late 2022. Water temperatures within whelk pots have been logged throughout the year, a mark and recapture tagging experiment monitored the movements of whelks returning to impacted sites and work with Essex University studied the effect of increased water temperatures on local whelks

After using side scan sonar and sound cameras to start to identify and map *Sabellaria* reefs on the Goodwin Sands MCZ and reviewing the charted movement of its dynamic sand banks over nearly 150 years; officers worked with local fishers and conservation groups to develop management

Overview— 2023-2024

for the whole of the site. In addition, management options were also developed and agreed for the remaining Tranche 3 MCZ sites (Dover to Deal, and Swanscombe).

Working closely with Defra and the National Shipbuilding Office (NSO) the Authority reviewed its current marine assets and agreed to progress with the procurement of a cabin RIB, that would be part funded by Defra (£300,000). This builds on previous work by the Association of IFCAS that had secured access to Defra's capital replacement fund as part of the 2021 Spending Review. Specific vessel specifications were reviewed by a technical panel and a tender process was run with Kent County Council.

Throughout the year KEIFCA enforcement officers worked hard both on land and at sea to enforce existing legislation and have used targeted enforcement operations to address specific enforcement issues (cockles, bass, MPAs). Officers have contributed to national enforcement and training groups and worked closely with the MMO and other partners on specific shared priorities like bass enforcement or shoreline collection.

As we move forward into a new regulatory landscape framed by Fisheries Management Plans it is more important than ever to engage and encourage local fishers and the wider community to take part in shaping this future. A good example of this was working with the AIFCA, to lead a national engagement project to capture first hand feedback from fishers and review and prioritise actions in the Crab and Lobster FMP and the Whelk FMP.

KEIFCA staff are at the very heart of our success and have been key in delivering our strategies and plans. I thank them for their help in making it possible to deliver our vision of enabling sustainable development in our seas. The expertise and skills within KEIFCA are vital to its continuing success and we look forward to delivering another successful year in 2024/25.

Will Wright, Chief Officer



Vision and Duties

The national IFCA vision

"Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities will lead, champion and manage a sustainable marine environment and inshore fisheries, by successfully securing the right balance between social, environmental and economic benefits to ensure healthy seas, sustainable fisheries and a viable industry"

Kent and Essex IFCA **DUTIES**

Competent and Relevant Authority for transposed directives:

- The Habitats Directive 1992
- The Water Framework Directive 2000
- The Marine Strategy Framework

Managing local fishery orders:

- The Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery Order 1994
- The River Roach Oyster Fishery Order 2013.

Duties under Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009

Section 153. Managing the exploitation of sea fisheries resources in the district:

- a) Ensure exploitation of resources is sustainable.
- b) Balance social and economic benefits of fishing with environmental protection and recovery.
- c) Take steps to achieve sustainable development.
- d) Balance the different needs of stakeholders.

Section 154. Protection of marine conservation zones:

- a) Seek to ensure that the conservation objectives of any MCZ in the district are furthered

The Kent and Essex IFCA District

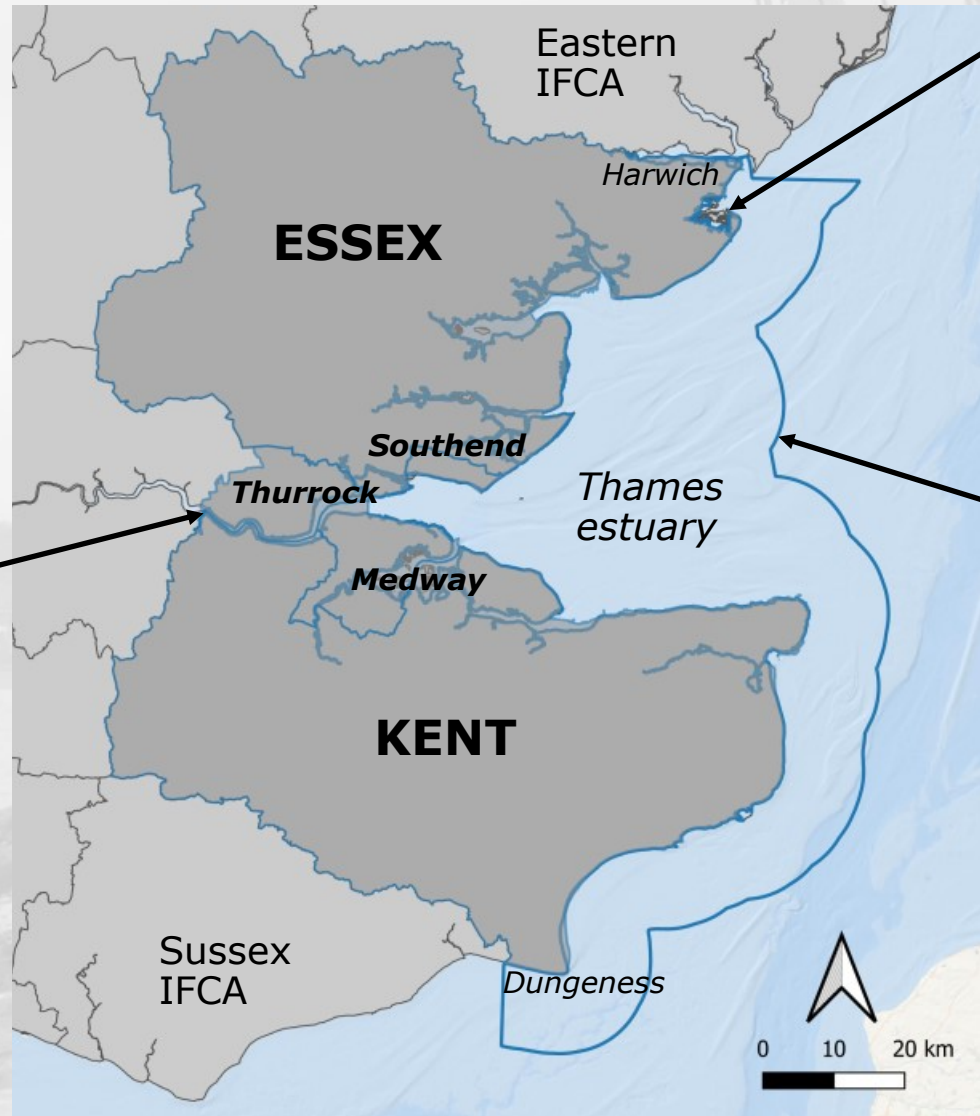
Chart of the KEIFCA district

The Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Order 2010 defines the extent of both the landward and seaward elements of the District:

- the combined areas of the relevant councils (the "basic area" of the district); and
- the sea adjacent to the basic area to a distance of six nautical miles from the 1983 baselines.

Upstream district boundaries

The up-river KEIFCA boundary in the Thames includes the waters adjacent to Kent County Council and Thurrock Council, with the district boundary running from Dartford creek (River Darent) on the south shore to Mar Dyke on the north shore. District limits for other rivers and estuaries located within the boundaries of Kent and Essex are to their tidal limit (including the Medway, Blackwater, Crouch and Colne).



Coastline

The coastline of the District is extremely varied, including the reported 'longest coastline of any county' in Essex with its creeks and rivers, to the open Channel coast and chalk cliffs of South Kent, stretching approximately 800km.

Seaward district boundaries

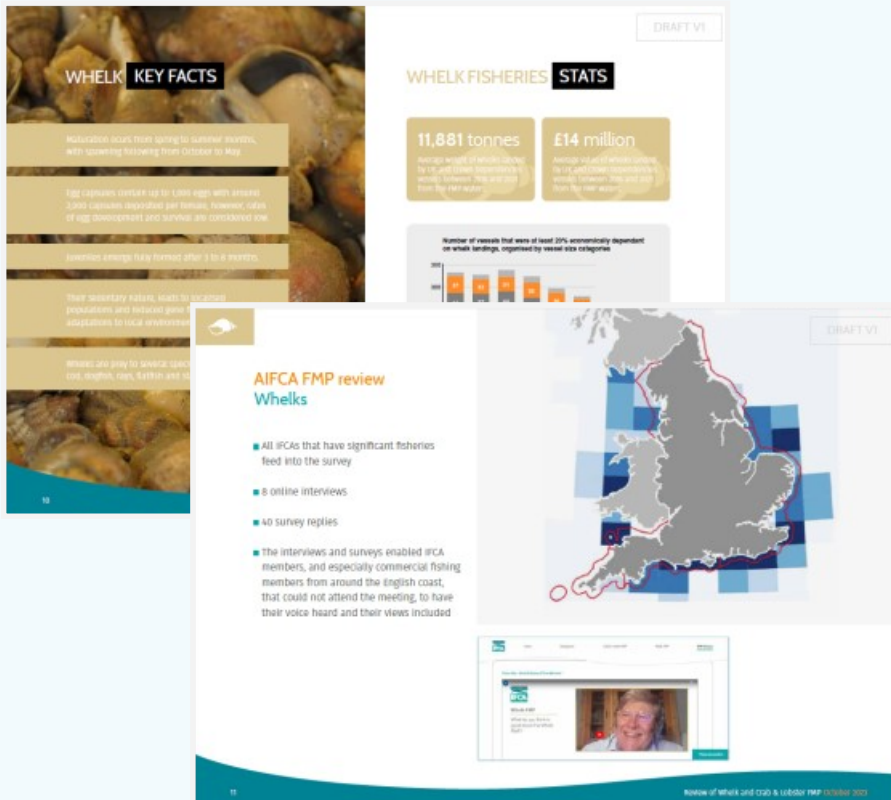
Kent & Essex IFCA district covers an area of over 3,379 km², and extends from the east end of Rye Bay in Kent to the northern boundary of Essex on the River Stour. The seaward boundary follows the 6 mile nautical limit measured from the 1983 baseline, which, due to drying sand banks, extends up to 15 miles offshore at its furthest point.



Success Criterion 1: Communications and Engagement

Leading AIFCA crab & lobster and whelk FMP consultation reply

Working with the Association of IFCAs, KEIFCA officers ran a specific project to help facilitate and support the FMP consultation process, to engage IFCA members at a national level, share best practice and provide a platform for regionally focused IFCAs to collaborate and inform national plans. The project focused on two FMPs, The Crab and Lobster FMP and the Whelk FMP, that between them constitute a significant proportion of the inshore fishing economy and have had a history of regional management measures.



A key component of the project was to develop a bespoke website that could providing a one stop shop for all the relevant FMP documents, and important information pertaining to the stocks. Using the feedback and evidence gathered from all the IFCA members around the coast, in the form of filmed interviews and questionnaire replies, a workshop, run by the Association and KEIFCA officers reviewed IFCA Members evidence, drew together a national reply, and prioritised key actions.

The workshop held in Poole (RNLI training centre) over the 26 and 27 September, was well attended by over 40 people from around the coast. The meeting reviewed the feedback from bespoke questionnaires and recorded evidence, and then worked to review and prioritise actions. DEFRA FMP leads took an active role in the meeting and reflected that the meeting proved immensely useful in reviewing the plans, highlighting regional similarities and differences and forming a clear idea of the critical tasks.

Success Criterion 1: Communications and Engagement

A 50-page summary document that compiled the views and priorities from the participants was produced from the meeting and submitted along with one-to-one video evidence to DEFRA. The feedback from DEFRA was again very positive and senior officers appreciated the extent of the engagement process, the huge range of expertise and experience—from fishermen to marine scientists—that fed into the project and the collaborative nature of prioritising key FMP actions.

Once the plans were published in December 2023 it was clear that some of the key points from the project has been included and prioritised in the final draft of the plans. KEIFCA officers are in discussions with DEFRA regarding updating and repurposing the website, so that it can act as a repository and portal charting the implementation of the FMPs.



Success Criterion 1— Outputs

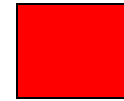
Action	Completion Status	Outputs Completed	Next steps
ONGOING ACTION: 1A) Support the Association of IFCAs		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributed financially to the funding of the AIFCA • Attended 4 AIFCA meetings and took forward meeting actions • CIFCO sits on AIFCA as a Director • Chair of KEIFCA sits as a member of AIFCA • Fed into AIFCA annual plan and report 	
ONGOING ACTION: 1B) Support national IFCA working groups		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attended 4 NIMEG meetings and took forward meeting actions • Contributed to the running of NIMEG in officer time. • Attended 4 TAG meetings • Contributed to the running of TAG in officer time • Fed into the annual report to COG • 10 Chief Officers Group meetings 	
ONGOING ACTION: 1C) Attend and contribute to external meetings		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 21 Fisheries Management Plan meetings • 10 Chief Officers Group meetings • 7 Natural England meetings • 7 MAFCO meetings 	
ONGOING ACTION: 1D) Reply to Consultations/ Correspondence		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25 consultations processed • Local and national information requests and replies processed 	



Objective completed



Significant progress made but objective not completed



Minimal progress made

Action	Completion Status	Outputs Completed	Next steps
ONGOING ACTION: 1E) Maintain website, quarterly e-bulletin, and stakeholder database		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The website has been regularly updated with Quarterly meeting papers, before meetings so that the community can be briefed before the Authority meeting. Decisions made by Members are added within 1 week of each meeting to the papers. New website under construction. The ebulletin has been reviewed to include more content relating to the work of bodies that work in association with the IFCA Maintained an up-to-date list of addressed and email addresses of stakeholders, updated every 12 months 	Further updates to website required to improve accessibility
1F) Run consultations that help gather feedback and evidence on future cockle management legislation		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specific website to ensure aims of consultation process for the review of the cockle fishery within Kent & Essex are clear and transparent Consultation on the draft management plan and regulating order wording plus Statutory consultation undertaken for the new TECFO 24 Regulating Order 	
1G) Support community engagement in Tranche 3 MCZ management		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worked with local fishers, the Goodwin Sands Conservation Trust and other partner organisations to develop T3 MCZ management Goodwin Sands). 	
1H) Produce an Annual Communication Plan		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication plan is produced each year and contained within the Annual Plan. 	Further updates to website required to improve accessibility



Success Criterion 2: Compliance and Enforcement

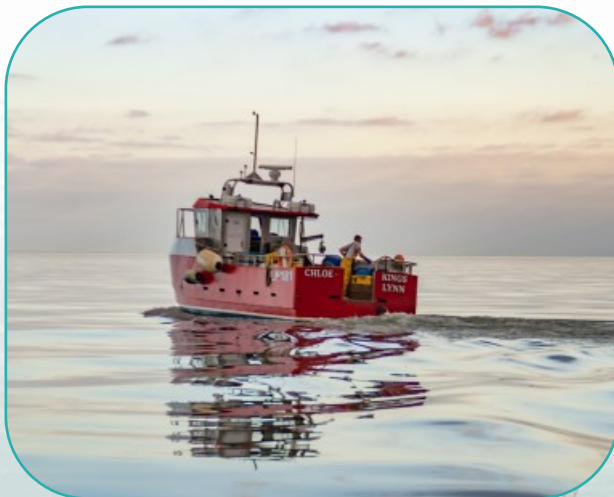
Compliance and Enforcement Introduction

KEIFCA is responsible for managing the sustainable use of sea fisheries resources within our District. To fulfil this duty, our warranted enforcement officers maintain an ongoing presence along the coast, conducting patrols and inspecting fishing activities to ensure compliance with relevant legislation. Enforcement priorities have reflected the seasonal cycle of key fisheries in the district, including bass, cockles and whelks, whereas Marine Protected Area enforcement, particularly monitoring of areas closed to bottom towed fishing gear, remain a year-round priority. A range of statistics demonstrating the hard work carried out by our enforcement officers can be seen on the infographic on the following page.

KEIFCA enforcement strategy follows a risk-based approach, using the best available intelligence to target individuals most likely to be operating illegally, maximising the efficiency of our operations. To enhance our efforts, we collaborate closely with partner agencies such as the Marine Management Organisation (MMO), Environment Agency, local authorities, Border Force, and the police, sharing key intelligence and working together to support each other's enforcement objectives. In 2023-24 we carried out a number of successful targeted joint operations with the MMO leading to the detection of bass fisheries offences, and additionally carried out cross-warranting with local Environment Agency fisheries enforcement officers to bolster each other's enforcement capabilities in the field.

Keeping up to date with the latest enforcement systems and technology also enables us to remain as effective as possible. KEIFCA have joined the other 9 IFCAs and MMO in developing and adopting a new digital intelligence and case management platform "Clue", which is already proving to be a powerful tool for collaborating, improving efficiency and developing and sharing intelligence. This is just one example of a suite of new enforcement systems in development, including Inshore-Vessel Monitoring System (I-VMS) for remote spatial monitoring of the under 10m fleet, Remote Electronic Monitoring Systems (see case study on following pages), and the Mobile Working App which is being developed for IFCAs to record inspection data digitally. These progressive solutions to age old challenges show that KEIFCA are embracing the bright future of modern, high-tech fisheries management.

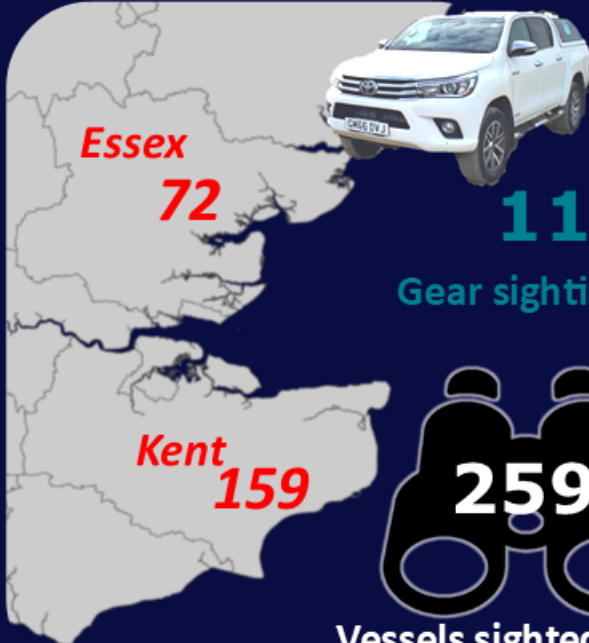
Hayden Hurst, Lead Compliance Officer



Success Criterion 2: Enforcement at a glance...

Enforcement statistics 2023/24

Number of shore patrols



116
Gear sightings



69
Gear inspections



598
Angling engagements



259
Vessels sighted at sea



95
Vessel inspections at sea



214
Intelligence reports processed



48
Offences recorded



171
Inspections from shore

2617

Nautical miles patrolled

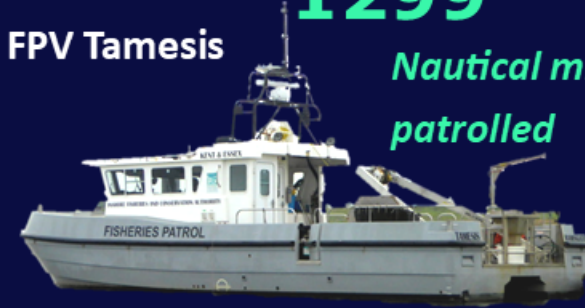


FPV Nerissa

1299

FPV Tamesis

Nautical miles patrolled



1460

Nautical miles patrolled

FPV Vigilant



Success Criterion 2: Compliance and Enforcement Report

Case study: Current and future cockle fishery spatial enforcement

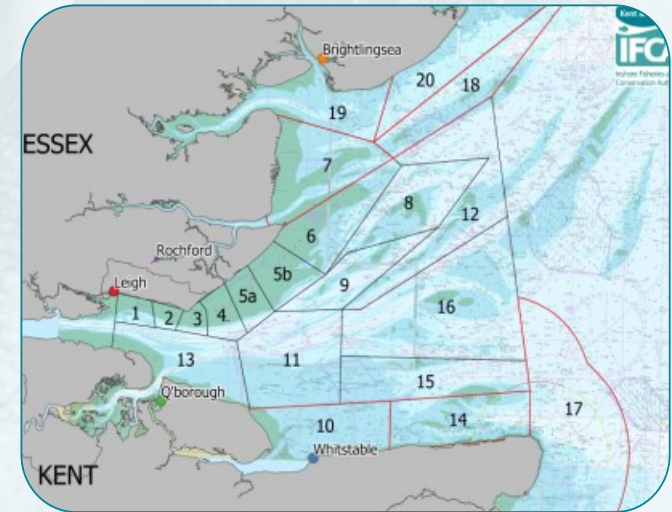
Cockle fishing in the Kent and Essex IFC district is subject to tight regulation, including restrictions on the location of fishing activity. The Thames is divided into harvesting areas for management purposes, with each area subject to a stock assessment to determine the available total allowable catch (TAC) for licenced vessels.

Through licence conditions KEIFCA open and close harvesting areas to ensure stocks are fished at sustainable levels. Incidents of vessels fishing closed areas are treated extremely seriously, as they can have a direct impact on stock sustainability and give an unfair advantage to the offender as they access grounds that compliant fishers do not. However, monitoring the movements of multiple fishing vessels over a large area of sea to ensure they fish only on open beds can be challenging.

In recent years there have been a number of incidents where cockle vessels have illegally fished on closed cockle beds. An incentive to do this typically occurs when the closed area contains larger, high value cockles, albeit with low stock levels, meaning the area cannot be opened to the cockle fleet as a whole.

In an ideal situation, KEIFCA's patrol vessel would be able to intercept and board a vessel while it is fishing in the closed area to provide the best available evidence to investigate the offence. Despite maintaining a visible presence at sea with our patrol vessels, they cannot cover all areas of the Thames around the clock. Technology in the form of Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS) which track the position, speed and bearing of commercial fishing vessels, has provided a vital tool for overarching spatial enforcement.

Regrettably in the 2023 Thames cockle fishery two offences were detected involving vessels fishing in a closed area. VMS data was crucial in the subsequent investigations, proving the positions and movement patterns of vessels in the closed area at the time of the suspected offences. This data was used to corroborate by other forms of evidence to prove that the suspected vessels were actively fishing. Once the investigation was concluded KEIFCA issued financial penalties totalling £3,000 for these spatial breaches.



Success Criterion 2: Compliance and Enforcement Report

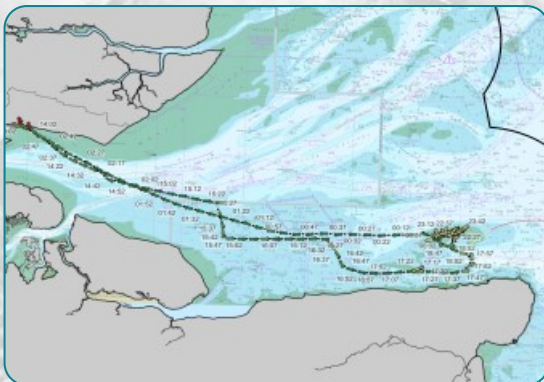
Although VMS tracks are a vital tool in monitoring spatial restrictions in the Thames cockle fishery it is not without its limitations. In our efforts to ever improve compliance we have begun to explore the latest cutting-edge technology enhance our spatial monitoring capabilities — **Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM)**.

Like VMS, REM incorporates a tracking device, but provides far higher resolution positioning data at 30 second intervals as opposed to 5 minute intervals from current VMS. But that isn't all. The REM device is linked to Bluetooth sensors mounted on the dredge head which detect when the dredge is deployed or retrieved from the water, automatically sending an alert to KEIFCA to notify that fishing activity has started or stopped. Furthermore, REM incorporates linked CCTV cameras centred on the dredge and hold which record real time footage of the dredge being towed through the water and cockles moving down the riddle and into the vessel hold. There is even the potential in future for machine learning to be applied to REM cameras to maximise data outputs, such as measuring the volume of cockles coming aboard.

REM is on track to be the next major technological development in fisheries management of this decade. National rollout of REM systems are currently being consulted on by DEFRA, however this project will focus on larger commercial vessels such as those in the pelagic trawling sector first. In the meantime, KEIFCA and other IFCA are independently working towards this gold standard. REM has already been trialled successfully in Devon and Severn IFCA mobile gear fisheries, and now KEIFCA has completed successful REM trails on two vessels in the Thames cockle fishery.

Results from the trial are extremely promising, and KEIFCA hope to roll out REM in the near future across the entire cockle fleet. From an enforcement standpoint, REM stands to drive improved compliance and provide the best possible evidence in future investigations, while reducing the need for costly FPV patrols to monitor the cockle fleet at sea. In a broader context, REM will also be able to provide our science teams with accurate data on fishing effort, which can in turn be used to implement increasingly flexible spatial and temporal management measures that would be simply unworkable without this technology.

Hayden Hurst, Lead Compliance Officer



Success Criterion 2: Compliance and Enforcement Report

Procurement of a new enforcement patrol vessel

IFCAs are created by the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, the impact assessment which accompanied MaCAA identified a requirement for funding for capital asset replacement. Prior to the UK leaving the EU, the European Marine and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) provided this under an enforcement provision, which enabled bids to the fund for the purposes of enforcement. A component of that enforcement provision was for replacement and maintenance of fixed assets, specifically related to the surface patrol fleet (patrol vessels).

Following the repatriation of funding after Brexit, the Association of IFCAs approached Defra regarding the requirement for funding for the capital replacement of vessels across IFCA's. Following negotiations between the AIFCA and Defra funding was made available by Defra to IFCAs as a domestic funding stream for the duration of the SR21 period for capital replacement of vessels. This takes place through the National Shipbuilding Office which oversees the government spend on new vessels.

As part of the AIFCA negotiations all IFCAs put forward indicative costings and types of vessels which may be required in the future. Kent and Essex IFCA submitted a proposal for contributions towards the purchase of a cabin RIB.

The purpose of the vessel is to replace Vigilant as the primary enforcement vessel in Essex. Vigilant is an open 7.8m Ribcraft RIB which came into service in 2020 and has proven extremely efficient both in terms of the budget required for the operation of the vessel, especially fuel burn, as well as staff resource required to operate the vessel at its full capability. The vessel acts as the primary enforcement vessel on the Essex coastline, whilst also providing fast response enforcement capability across the Thames Estuary, having been used in the Medway and on the Margate Sands.

However, the vessel does have its limitations. Being an open decked vessel means that the officers are exposed to the elements at all times during a patrol, where both extremes of heat and cold can have a significant restrictive effect on the capabilities of the officers at sea. The vessel also has very few facilities, with no means to heat food or water and no toilet facilities for officers. This restricts the length of patrols that the vessel can undertake and the amount of time the vessel can spend at sea.

It is intended that Vigilant will be moved to Kent and be moored in Ramsgate. Whilst Nerissa is an extremely capable, multipurpose enforcement vessel, with the ability to work in more extreme weather and over a much greater geographic area than any other vessel in the KEIFCA fleet, this does come with some consequences such as the fuel budget required, the carbon footprint of vessel operations in Kent and crewing requirements to enable boarding operations.



Success Criterion 2: Compliance and Enforcement Report



As a result, placing Vigilant in Ramsgate, initially on a trial basis, will allow officers to conduct more resource efficient patrols, when staff availability is restricted or when the patrol allows for it. This will cut costs on fuel budget for Nerissa and also reduce the carbon footprint of vessel operations in Kent.

Tender Process

Officers worked in liaison with the KCC procurement team and the National Shipbuilding Office, to invite tenders for the vessel. On 29th January 2024, KCC, acting on behalf of KEIFCA, published an invitation to tender (ITT) for a cabin RIB along with a technical specification for the vessel and application forms. The tender was open for a period of one month, closing on 29th February 2024.

Tender responses were subject to an initial assessment of procedural and company status compliance by the KCC procurement team. Officers then undertook an independent evaluation with each officer worked through each section of the procurement services evaluation spreadsheet and evaluated the contents of the Tender submission from each Boatyard.

On completion of the tender scoring process it was concluded that the tender and design submission from Ribcraft had good design points that were compatible with the Authority's requirements and specification. It was concluded that officers would recommend proceeding with that tender, subject to budgetary approval and the agreement of KEIFCA. Following this process the purpose of this meeting is to discuss and approve the evaluation and recommendations from officers.

Contract and build commencement

Contracts were signed with Ribcraft in September 2024 with the build starting shortly after. At the time of writing the hull is being constructed and some major components such as engines and key electronic components have been purchased.

The vessel is due to be delivered in May 2025, aiming to enter regular service in time for the start of the new Thames Estuary Cackle Fishery Order 2024.



Dominic Bailey, Assistant Chief

Success Criterion 2 – Outputs

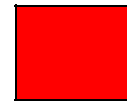
Action	Completion Status	Outputs Completed	Next steps
ONGOING ACTION: 2A) Coordinate KEIFCA enforcement effectively with national partners		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KEIFCA attendance at all NIMEG meetings. LCO sits on Task & Finish groups within NIMEG for investigations, C&E strategy and FAP development. Also LCO acting a liaison for Bass Management Group on behalf of NIMEG. • Regular joint work with partner organisations, MMO joint enforcement operations, and joint patrols with Police and Local Authority Environmental Health conducted. • Improved intelligence reporting and sharing through new Clue intel systems. • Delivered training for partners including Environment Agency cross warranting. 	Expand cross warrant training to include neighbouring IFCAs
ONGOING ACTION: 2B) Maintain and run national enforcement systems and processes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intel: 214 intelligence reports processed to national standards. Training given to officers on a individual needs basis to foster best practise and improve standards. Relevant intel for partner agencies gathered and disseminated. Improved reporting/awareness of intel between partner agencies relating via attendance at TCG meetings. Working with NIMEG to deliver new "Clue" intel software to replace national intel database. Prioritised rapid dissemination of information relating to safety issues. • Maritime and Coastal Surveillance System (MCSS) records maintained for inspections from shore, at sea, incidental sightings and investigations data in accordance with national reporting requirements. • Engaging with NIMEG on gaining KEIFCA access to MMO Mobile Working App for future fisheries inspection records. 	Contribute via NIMEG to trialling and developing Mobile Working App for IFCA use
ONGOING ACTION: 2C) Plan effective enforcement operations and actions		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three operation orders implemented to target enforcement on high risk seasonal fisheries (one for cockle fishery and two targeting bass non-compliance) • Tasking and Coordination Group (TCG) meetings held on biweekly basis to focus resources on high risk intel. Increased attendance at TCG meetings from partner agencies including Environment Agency, Border Force, and MMO. Increased emphasis on filling intelligence gaps based on the number of reports submitted from each of the six district areas. • TCG charts continued and improved, used effectively for enforcement outcome review and taskings. TCG inclusion of dispensations active and national vessel of interest lists. • Enforcement SharePoint site used on a daily basis by officers. "Enforcement Record System" used to record all inspection data, vessel ID monitored and maintained by a duty officer in each county. • Case file management system maintained to national standards. • Patrol planning system updated and streamlined, now in use on daily basis by officers in the field. Reporting on outputs has improved and become easier as a result. • KEIFCA Crib books reviewed, updated and expanded to improve officer understanding and knowledge in the field. • Annual plans and reports completed. 	Adopt new CLUE software system when released for intel and case management
ONGOING ACTION: 2D) Compile case files and oversee prosecutions		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case files built and proportionate outcomes delivered according to legal advice in line with Compliance and Enforcement Strategy. • National protocol and best practises adopted via NIMEG. • X4 FAPs issued and paid. X9 official written warnings issued. • Officers attended Competent Officer course (x3). On-the-job training and feedback from supervision of LCO given to officers routinely when building case files and gathering evidence. 	Further formal training required to improve and maintain officers skills
ONGOING ACTION: 2E) Maintain and run seagoing enforcement assets		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KEIFCA vessels maintained for enforcement purposes. • At sea enforcement equipment maintained, boarding bags checked regularly to maintain equipment. • Reports on vessel operation delivered to the Authority. 	



Objective completed



Significant progress made but objective not completed



Minimal progress made

Action	Completion Status	Outputs Completed	Next steps
ONGOING ACTION: 2F) Enforcement activities – sea-based		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 132 sea patrols: 48 fishing vessel boardings and 40 gear inspections completed. • Improved and updated understanding of partner agency intelligence interests from attending joint meetings and external TCGs. • Intel gathered and compliance risk prioritised and actioned via TCG and Operation Orders, in addition to reactive enforcement to live Intelligence when needed. • Body Worn Video used routinely for inspections at sea and footage used as evidence in case files. • Support MMO / joint taskings at sea to detect offences in key bass fishery. 	Further joint agency sea patrol work
ONGOING ACTION: 2G) Maintain and run land based enforcement assets		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KEIFCA vehicles maintained for enforcement patrol use. • At sea enforcement equipment maintained, shore bags checked regularly to maintain equipment. • Body Worn Video used routinely for inspections on shore, footage used as evidence in case files. • New PPE and torches purchased for night work. • New scales and calibration weights purchased for byelaw enforcement. 	
ONGOING ACTION: 2H) Enforcement activities – shore-based		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 231 shore patrols and 171 shore-based inspections completed • Intel gathered and compliance risk prioritised and actioned via TCG and Operation Orders in addition to reactive enforcement to live Intelligence when needed. 	
ONGOING ACTION: 2I) Enforcement training		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All staff refresher training on Conflict Resolution & Breakaway techniques. • Accreditation programme undertaken by a select number of IFCOs, ACIFCO continues to develop programme nationally. • Updates to legislation and procedures disseminated to officers by ACIFCO and LCO. • CRIB books issued to all officers, content under continuous review. CRIBs are used by officers in the field on a routine basis for specific needs and to maintain knowledge of legislation and procedure. • Training with partner agencies including Essex Police, Environment Agency, MMO. • Operational training package encompassed by CRIB books and subject to continuous review. Aim to train new staff and standardise/optimize experienced staff skillsets. • Admin assistant is trained in data extraction and data processing required for TCG charts • Officers are cross-warranted with the Environment Agency (limited SAFFA warrants. Also 7 EA staff cross-warranted to enforce KEIFCA byelaws. 	Increase formal and in house IFCO training
2J) Improve our use of enforcement information		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enforcement Record System on SharePoint records enforcement data effectively • Working with MMO and NIMEG to develop Mobile Working App for recording inspections • Clue software developed for IFCA and MMO use as national intel and case management system. 	Implement Clue and MWA
2K) Integrate Marine Protected Area enforcement risks into KEIFCA enforcement activities		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MPAs feature in risk register • Regular patrols tasked to patrol MPA management measure areas including bottom towed gear prohibited areas and No Take Zone. • MCSS updated where applicable 	
2L) Improve records of private ground boundaries and understanding of their fishing rights		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GIS maps created for private grounds in the KEIFCA district. • New section added to officer CRIB books to ensure all staff are informed of these areas. 	



Success Criterion 3: Management Measures

Agreeing then applying for a new cockle regulating order for the Thames

From September 2021 and the start of the 'listening phase' KEIFCA officer and members have worked through a 5-step process that reviewed and then developed a new cockle management system. Although a lot of the work focused on the development of a new regulatory order, the boundaries of the new order have created more space and opened up more cockle beds for smaller scale cockle fishing to take place.

Over the 4 previous stages of the process, the Authority first reviewed key features of any new management system like the size and shape of any management boundaries, whether management would be brought in using a regulating order or a byelaw and the numbers of vessels and their gear type. From this step the Authority agreed to bring in a new regulating order for the large-scale bulk cockle fishery and set a maximum and minimum number of licences. The subsequent consultation reviewed the access process and criteria as well as the length of a licence and the regulating order, and the third consultation focused primarily on the detail and wording of the application process and addressed issues around ownership of the new licences.

Building on the significant work that outlined and created a new regulating order, the majority of the work this year has been reviewing the detail and agreeing the final wording of the new legislation. In April 2023 KEIFCA started the application process for a new Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery Order 2024 with DEFRA and in late spring ran Consultation 4 that provided all stakeholders with an opportunity to comment on the full draft Regulating Order and management plan. Feedback and comments from the consultation were presented to the Authority at a special Authority meeting in July, and then passed on to Defra. Over the next 6 months officers worked with Defra subject leads and legal experts to progress the regulating order through the necessary evaluations and checks and answer any questions.

Starting on the 28 February 2024, and following the process laid out in the Sea Fisheries (shellfish) Act 1967, Defra published the draft Order and initiated a 30-day period where stakeholders could comment, and any objection could be submitted. A copy of the proposed Order, Management Plan and a chart of the locality of the limits of the proposed Order were included in this statutory process. KEIFCA officers worked with Defra counterparts to engage with stakeholders with over 200 emails being sent out to interested stakeholders and an advert placed in Fishing News.

In total there was one response on behalf of fourteen supporting the new order and one objection. KEIFCA officers worked with Defra leads to address any concerns raised by the objection. Defra have informed us that the new Minister is minded to support the new regulating order but is waiting for an appropriate parliamentary slot to lay the legislation.

Dominic Bailey, Assistant Chief Officer

Success Criterion 3: Management Measures



Success Criterion 3 – Outputs

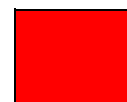
Action	Completion Status	Outputs Completed	Next steps
ONGOING ACTION: 3A) Administration of KEIFCA licences and permits		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Processed 30 cockle permits and 14 licence applications • Produced 4 cockle fishery update letters • Held industry meetings to discuss management measures for cockle fishery • Processed 25 whelk permit applications • Produced 1 whelk fishery update letters 	
ONGOING ACTION: 3B) Administration of new KEIFCA legislation (e.g. Byelaws and Regulating Orders)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued to maintain communications with the MMO Byelaw team in order to inform national resource allocation for progression of IFCA byelaws. • Engaged with the MMO byelaw team to provide advance notification of upcoming byelaws in early development by KEIFCA • Engaged with Defra through the Shellfish Team and legal to develop new TECFO based upon the indicative wording submitted by KEIFCA with the Regulating Order application. 	
3C) Progress the development of future Cockle fishery management and legislation		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed and created a consultation document and supporting information for the purposes of running Consultation 1 of the review into cockle fishery management within the KEIFCA district. • Developed and created a consultation document and supporting information for the purposes of running Consultation 2 of the review into cockle fishery management within the KEIFCA district. • Developed and created a consultation document and supporting information for the purposes of running Consultation 3 of the review into cockle fishery management within the KEIFCA district. • Engaged services of Band Agency to carry out oral evidence project for consultations to help stakeholders input their views to the process in a way other than the traditional survey-type format used by most regulators. Oral evidence project was then integrated into the purpose-built website, established for the cockle review. • Held 3 extraordinary Authority meetings to enable members to make decisions in a timely manner to meet the objectives and timescales necessary for successful delivery of the project. 	



Objective completed



Significant progress made but objective not completed



Minimal progress made



Action	Completion Status	Outputs Completed	Next steps
3D) Provide input into the development of Fisheries Management Plans		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Led the AFICA national response to the crab & lobster and whelk FMP. • Ran a members workshop and complied a KEIFCA reply to the national consultation on the first 5 FMPs • Led the IFCA engagement on the Whelk FMP, and set on the Whelk Working group and the evidence working group. • FMP lead officer for COG 	
3E) Complete tranche 3 MPA assessments and when required develop appropriate management measures		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • T3 MCZ fisheries assessments completed • Worked with local stakeholders to develop management options for Goodwin Sands site. • Discussions with MMO and NE held about joint site management. 	
3F) Further measures and management to aid the recovery of native oysters in in the BCRC MCZ		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne Estuaries MCZ Native Oyster byelaw in force. • Data collection did not occur due to annual survey not taking place under COVID restrictions • Process in place to discuss fishery opening with stakeholders including industry, Natural England, NGO's and other stakeholders. 	
3G) Contribute and support the Fish Local project		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worked with Thames Estuary Partnership to obtain funding from London Gateway develop the Fish Local project and build a stronger local market for fish. • Assisted with bid from Seafood and Fisheries Fund to help support and grow the project • Members of Fish Local presented to Members on work undertaken at IFCA meetings 	'Commercial Fishing Assessment' process not yet established—carry into next Annual Plan
3H) Provide support for process of SE Marine Plan review and update		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work closely with SE area marine planning lead • Officers attended marine prioritisation workshops on behalf of IFCAs • Officers feeding into marine plan review processes 	

Success Criterion 4: Governance and Training

Recruitment of a cockle officer

This year, Kent and Essex IFCA embarked on a process to recruit a Cockle Officer to provide dedicated resource for workstreams related to the cockle fisheries within the District, especially with regards to the proposed Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery Order 2024. The Thames Estuary is home to some of the UK's most productive cockle beds, and the new Regulating Order introduces updated regulations and a more structured management framework when compared to the previous legislation, aimed at sustainable cockle harvesting in this sensitive marine environment. The addition of a Cockle Officer to Kent and Essex IFCA is essential to ensuring that the Thames Estuary's cockle resources are managed in alignment with the new requirements contained within the TECFO 2024 management plan and will be our lead officer for the new Cockle FMP workstream.

Background

The Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery Order 2024 establishes a comprehensive framework for managing cockle harvesting within the Thames Estuary. This Order grants the IFCA authority to continue to regulate cockle fishing, including control over licensing, harvest limits, and closed seasons. It is designed to protect the estuary's ecological health while supporting the long-term economic interests of local fishing communities. Given the growing environmental pressures on marine resources, this updated Order is crucial for ensuring the sustainable future of the cockle fishery in the Thames Estuary.

The recruitment of a Cockle Officer aligns with the objectives of the 2024 Order, as this role will focus on implementing the new regulations and ensuring compliance with the Order's sustainability and conservation standards.

A dedicated post for the new TECFO 2024

The new Cockle Officer post helps address several specific challenges related to resource sustainability, regulatory enforcement, and community engagement in the Thames Estuary area and helps link our local work to the national Cockle FMP actions:

Implementing Sustainable Harvesting Practices—One of the central goals of the 2024 Order is to manage cockle stocks sustainably to prevent overharvesting. The Cockle Officer will play a crucial role in monitoring cockle beds, enforcing sustainable harvest limits, and assessing stock health. The Officer will be responsible for assisting in setting quotas and advising on fishing seasons based on scientific assessments. By implementing these measures, the Cockle Officer will support the Order's aim to preserve cockle stocks for future generations.

Regulatory Compliance and Licensing under the 2024 Order—The Cockle Fishery Order gives Kent and Essex IFCA authority to issue licences, set fishing boundaries, and enforce compliance in the Thames Estuary. The Cockle Officer will ensure that all licensed fishers adhere to the requirements set by the 2024 Order, including observing designated fishing areas, harvest limits, and closed periods.



Success Criterion 4: Governance and Training



In this capacity, the Cockle Officer will work with enforcement officers to conduct regular patrols, inspections, and oversight of licensed operations, ensuring that all fishing activities within the fishery align with the IFCA's sustainability goals and the legal framework established by the Order.

Environmental Protection and Ecosystem Health—The Thames Estuary is a delicate ecosystem, home to a diverse range of marine life, including species that depend on cockles as a food source. Sustainable cockle harvesting is therefore essential to maintaining the health of the estuary's wider ecosystem.

The Cockle Officer will evaluate the environmental impact of cockle fishing and enforce practices that minimise habitat disruption. This role will help ensure compliance with the environmental protection standards set by the 2024 Order, balancing the needs of the cockle industry with the preservation of biodiversity in the estuary.

Supporting Local Fishing Communities—The 2024 Order aims to secure the livelihoods of local fishing communities by stabilizing cockle stocks. By ensuring sustainable practices, the Order provides a foundation for long-term economic benefits. The Cockle Officer will engage directly with local stakeholders, educating fishers on best practices and gathering input on management decisions. Through collaboration, the Officer will support a shared commitment to responsible fishing practices that benefit both the industry and the estuary's environmental health.

Fostering relationships with local fishers and other stakeholders is vital to promote community engagement and collaboration on sustainable fishing practices.

Data Collection and Adaptive Management—The Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery Order 2024 emphasises the importance of evidence-based management. To support this, the Cockle Officer will oversee data collection on cockle populations, harvest rates, and ecological factors. Analysing data and coordinating research to inform adaptive management strategies and support the long-term objectives of the Order. This data will enable the IFCA to make informed decisions, adjust quotas, and respond to changing environmental conditions. The Cockle Officer will also collaborate with marine biologists and research institutions to integrate the latest scientific findings into cockle fishery management at both a local and national level.

Conclusion

The recruitment of a Cockle Officer by Kent and Essex IFCA, to start in May 2024, marks a critical step in the continued improvement of sustainable cockle management in the Thames Estuary. This role is designed to ensure that regulations are effectively implemented, balancing environmental stewardship with the economic interests of local communities. This new post provides resource to share our expertise at the national cockle FMP forum and bring back and implementing best practice from others. By focusing on sustainability, compliance, and adaptive management, the Cockle Officer will help the IFCA protect the Thames Estuary's cockle resources, securing the future of this valuable fishery for both the ecosystem and the livelihoods it supports.

Dominic Bailey, Assistant Chief IFCO



Success Criterion 4 – Outputs

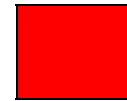
Action	Completion Status	Outputs Completed	Next steps
ONGOING ACTION: 4A) Budget Management - Handling invoices, Oracle Administration, compile budget, budget meetings etc. Manage and coordinate funding applications e.g. EU		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approved budget with quarterly updates • Maintained and processed 13 oracle statements • Held internal budget planning & review meetings • Mid and end of year Internal audit completed • Budget held for NLTO post on behalf of AIFCA • Processed 814 invoices 	
ONGOING ACTION: 4B) Annual planning and reporting		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Created and published 2024-2025 annual plan and 2022-2023 annual report • Documented and presented to Authority and displayed on website 	
ONGOING ACTION: 4C) Facilitating staff matters - Run current staff performance monitoring system. Run annual staff workshop. Recruiting new staff. H&S reviews. Responsibility for HR matters – contracts, payroll, pensions etc.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual staff appraisals undertaken • Maintained and updated H&S documentation 	
ONGOING ACTION: 4D) IFCA Meetings - Run and provide support for quarterly IFCA meetings and technical panel meetings.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Held 4 quarterly meetings with approved minutes. • Held 2 extraordinary Authority meetings with approved minutes • Maintained handbook for Members 	
ONGOING ACTION: 4E) Staff training - Accredited Enforcement Training, Internal training, PACE course training, Sea tickets/training, survey training (ATV training) etc.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 officers completed sea survival training • 5 officers completed 1st aid training • 3 officers completed fire fighting training • 10 officers completed security awareness training • 3 officers completed the competent officer course • 10 officers completed PSSR training • 3 staff completed working at heights, manual handling and confined space training • 1 officer completed Advanced Powerboat training • 1 officer completed short range VHF training • 1 officer completed LOLOR training • 11 officers completed anaphylaxis training • 3 officers completed Workboat Code 3 stability training • 3 officers completed COSHH training • 11 completed cybersecurity training • 2 completed GDPR training • 9 completed conflict resolution training 	



Objective completed



Significant progress made but objective not completed



Minimal progress made

Action	Completion Status	Outputs Completed	Next steps
ONGOING ACTION: 4F) General administration - Fill in timesheets, filing, post, travel & expenses, purchase card etc.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management of timesheets • Processed 29 travel & expenses claims • Maintained data records and filing 	
ONGOING ACTION: 4G) Health and Safety Systems		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual reporting of H&S issues to Authority • Regular meeting of H&S committee to discuss any issues and to put procedures in place to mitigate against further incidents. 	
4H) Health and Safety Audit		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued to liaise with KCC Health and Safety Business Operations Manager to review the existing Health & Safety policy with meetings to discuss specific requirements. • Developed a monitoring system for LOLER and COSHH onboard vessels • Senior officers undertook safety management system training for vessel operations • Key risk assessments were reviewed • Established links with an external auditor to assist in the review of existing and development of new systems and procedures for vessel operations with a view to compliance with Workboat Code 3 as required. 	Continue review of vessel ops and on shore risk assessments. Development of Safety Management Systems for all vessels.



Success Criterion 5: Evidence and Science Report

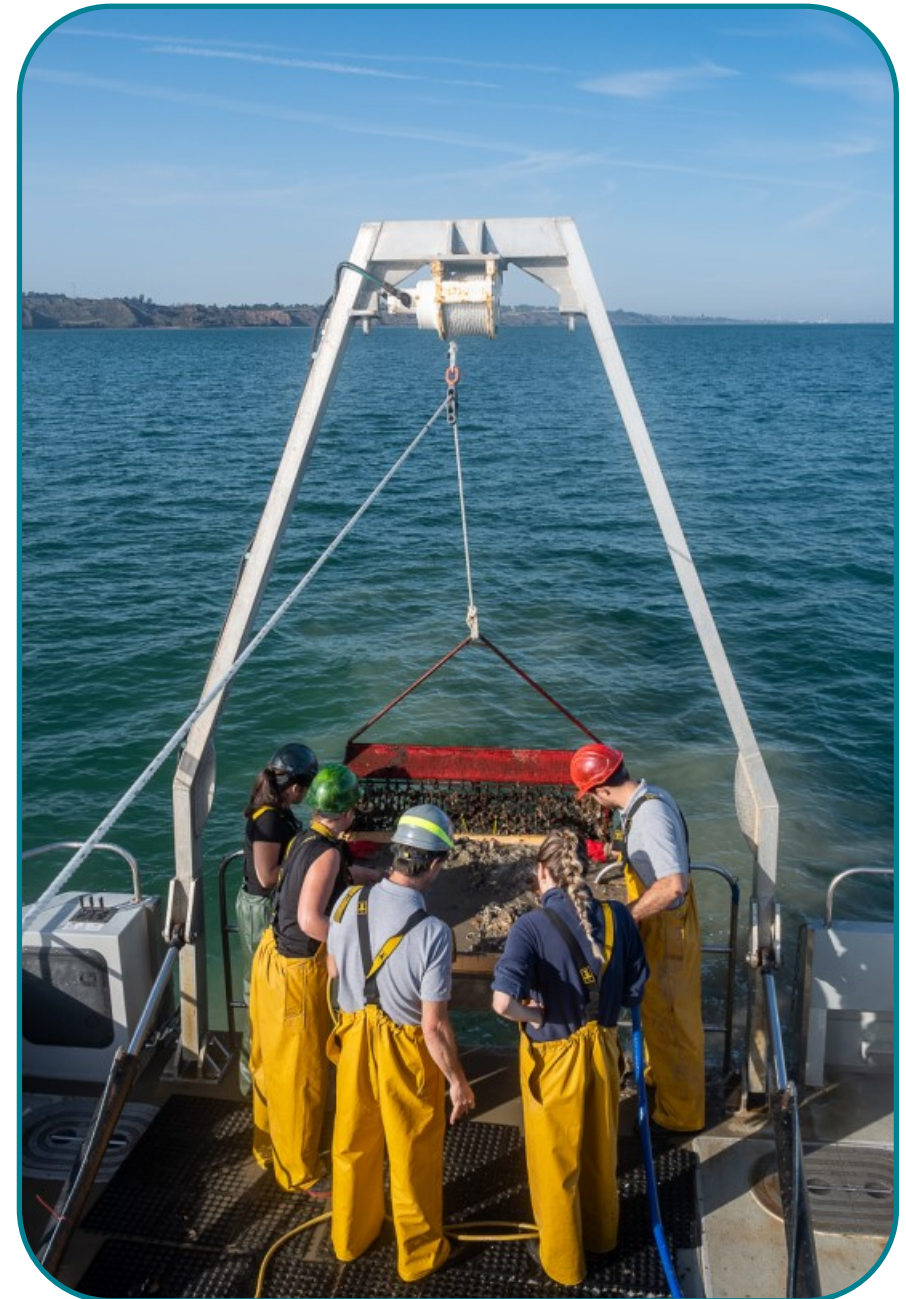
Evidence and Science Introduction

Kent and Essex IFCA conducts essential scientific research to support Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs), promote sustainable fisheries, and ensure accessible evidence (data and insights) within our district. The highlights of our 2023/2024 research agenda are presented under three themes: (1) Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), (2) Sustainable Fisheries, and (3) Access to Evidence. The first two themes report on how KEIFCA fulfils its statutory duties as set out in the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, and the third is the organisations obligation make information available to the public.

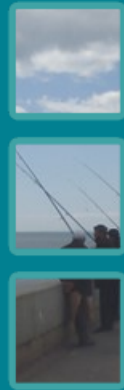
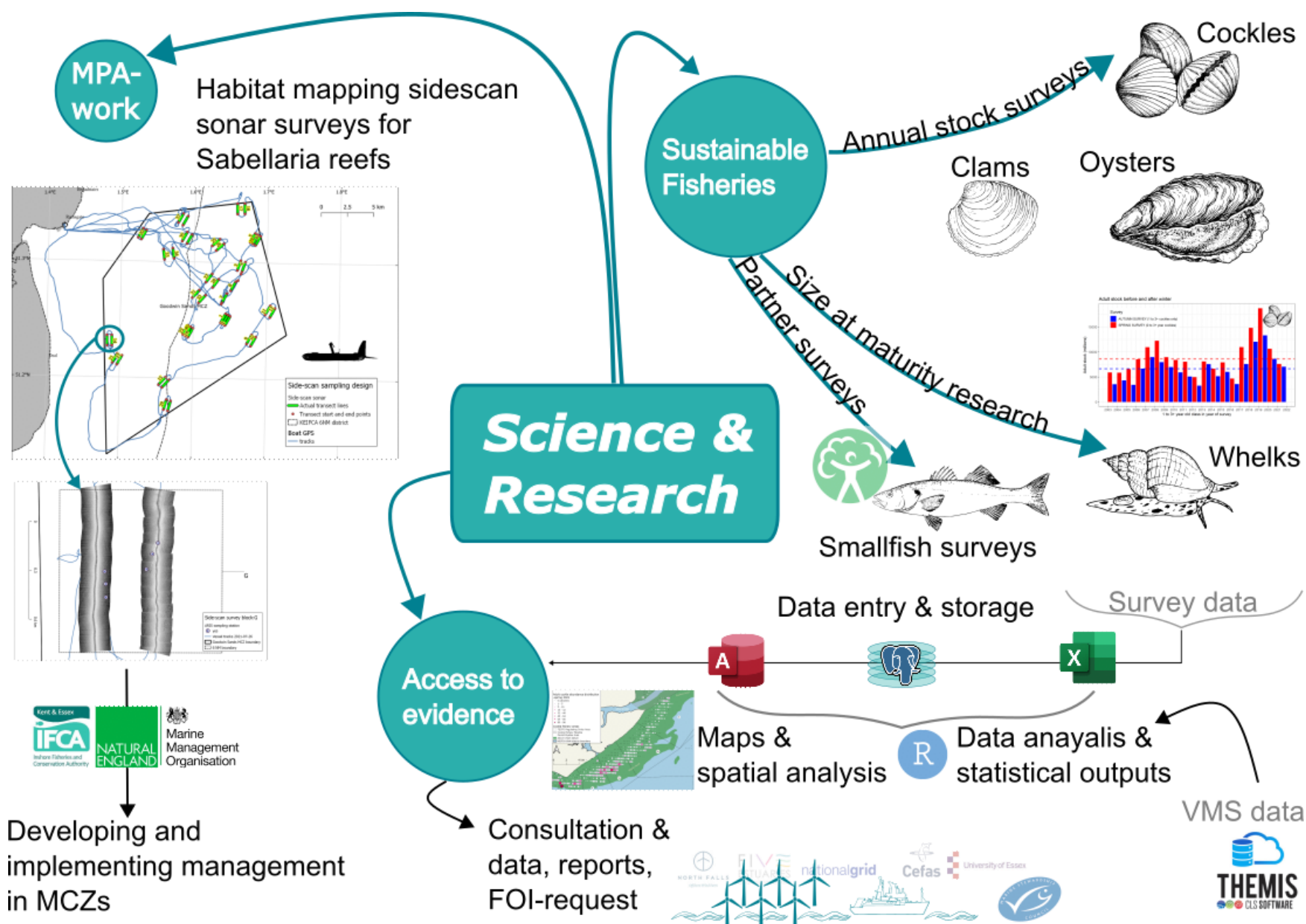
Through field surveys, we collect and analyse data to assess the status of key fish stocks, primarily shellfish, which guides fishery management across the district. For example, surveys of cockle stocks inform quota setting, access regulation, and the management of permit-based fisheries. This evidence base also informs decisions when fisheries are in decline, leading to management measures such as byelaws, regulatory adjustments, and enhanced enforcement.

In 2023/2024 KEIFCA's there was a strong focus on delivering Marine Protected Area (MPA) management for three Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) following on from earlier evidence gathering around Sabellaria reefs at Goodwin Sands MCZ. KEIFCA continued its work looking into mass mortality and recovery of the whelk population which occurred along the North Kent coast in the late summer of 2022.

Philip Haupt, Lead Scientific Officer



Success Criterion 5: Science at a glance...



Success Criterion 5: Evidence and Science Report

Marine Protected Areas

KEIFCA is the delivery body for MPAs, enforcing regulations within Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) and European Marine Sites (EMSs) within the District. In 2023 KEIFCA completed and submitted to Natural England, MCZ Fisheries Assessments from which management recommendations stem for Swanscombe, Dover to Deal, and Goodwin Sands MCZs. These Assessments were put together through collaborative work and consultation with a range of stakeholders, including Goodwin Sands Conservation Trust, the MMO, fishers and Fishing Associations in the District.

MCZ site descriptions:

- The Dover to Deal MCZ is a small, coastal site, extending approximately 1km from the mean high-water line. It protects sixteen designated features including rocky reef, chalk reef, biogenic reef, and sedimentary habitats.
- The Swanscombe MCZ is a small site located near the Dartford crossing in the Thames. The site protects intertidal mud and the nationally scarce tentacled lagoon worm (*Alkmaria romijni*).
- The Goodwin Sands MCZ is a large and highly dynamic site, dominated by mobile sandbanks located off the coast of Kent. The site protects a range of features including Ross worm (*Sabellaria spinulosa*) reef and lies partially within the KEIFCA District (inshore from the 6nm), and partially within the jurisdiction of the MMO (offshore from 6nm limit). The Goodwin Sands MCZ is the largest and most complex of the three sites, and thus became KEIFCA's focus.

In 2021 and 2022 KEIFCA carried out sidescan sonar surveys in partnership with Natural England, to ensure that the evidence used for informing management was sufficient for Ross worm reef. This data was processed and added to Natural England's Marine Evidence Database in 2023. Further work was undertaken in collaboration with the Goodwin Sands Conservation Trust to map shipwrecks across the site. Consultation with fishermen ensured that local knowledge of the site, along with existing activity was incorporated into decision-making. As the MMO is responsible for management of the offshore portion of the site, significant collaboration occurred, to ensure coherent management across the Goodwin Sands MCZ. The conclusion of the assessment of the Goodwin Sands MCZ incorporated all collaborations, and KEIFCA recommended a site-wide prohibition on bottom towed fishing activity.

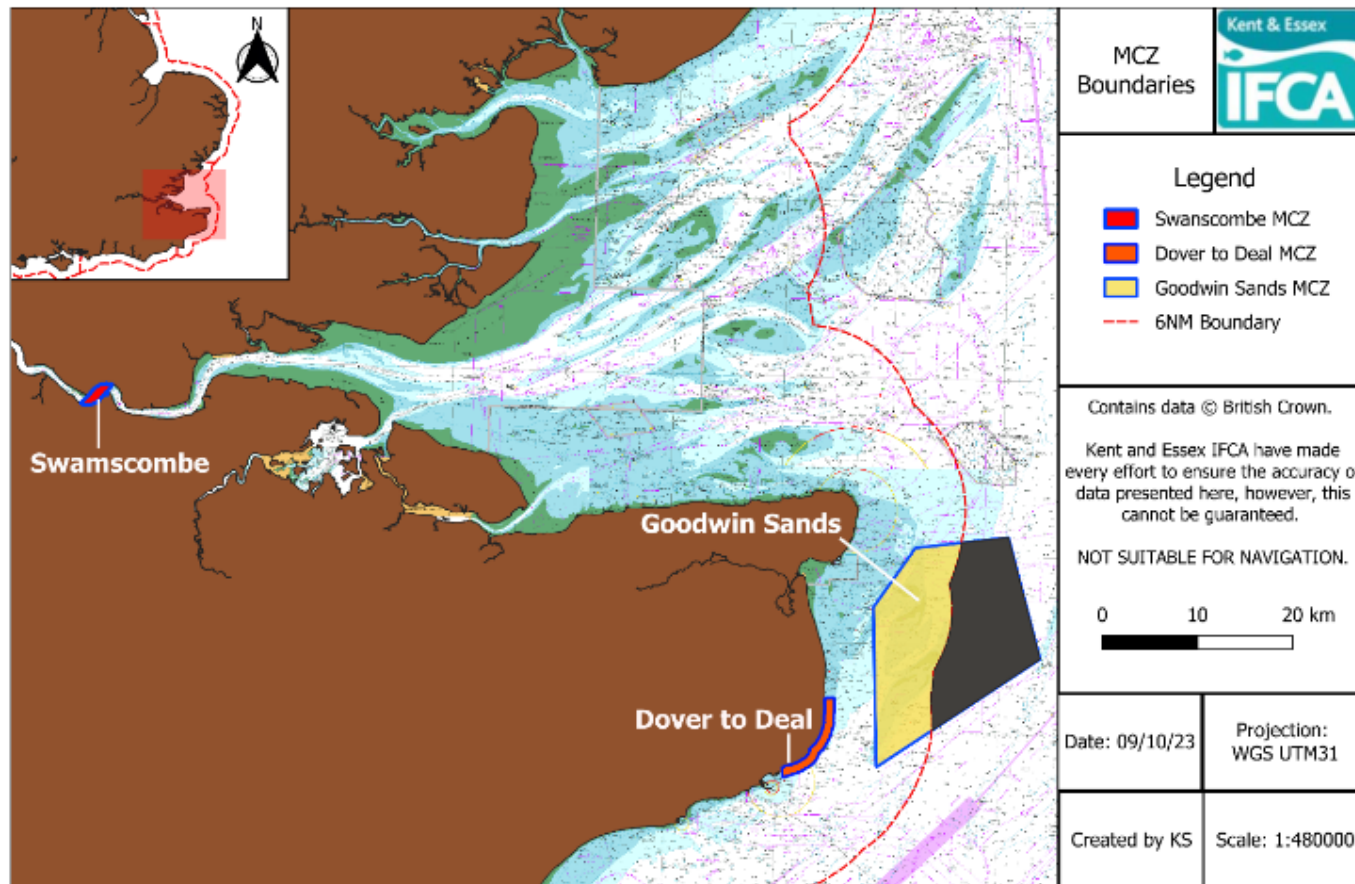


Success Criterion 5: Evidence and Science Report

The Swanscombe and Dover to Deal MCZ assessments were also completed in collaboration with local stakeholders through site visits and the distribution of flyers. To further conservation objectives at each site, the decision was made to ban bottom towed fishing gear from the entirety of both sites.

The management measures for all three sites were combined into an update of the existing bottom towed gear byelaw. All three areas were added to the schedule of the byelaw, to create a draft byelaw: Bottom Towed Fishing Gear (Prohibited Areas) Byelaw 2024. The updated byelaw will protect an additional ~170km² of seabed in the KEIFCA district from bottom towed fishing activity.

The draft byelaw, an Impact Assessment and an Economic Calculator was put forward to the Authority for approval. Formal consultation followed, and after this concluded, all three documents were passed onto the MMO for Quality Assurance. The MMO's response is anticipated in mid-2024. Once this stage is passed, the byelaw will go to parliament for further approval and implementation.



Katherine Stuart, Scientific Officer

Success Criterion 5: Evidence and Science Report

Sustainable Fisheries

KEIFCA's sustainable fisheries research focusses on three key shellfish stocks, namely (1) cockles, (2) oysters and (3) whelks and more recently (4) Manila clams have attracted interest. At this stage we are only carrying out Manila clam stock assessment surveys and gathering evidence that a sustainable fishery is a potential option. This will be explored in greater detail in 2024/2025 when a trial fishery is planned.

Cockles

The Thames cockle fishery is the most economically important shellfish fishery in the district and achieved MSC blue ecolabel status since 2020. The cockle fishery is managed through license conditions set of conditions and restrictions within a designated area within a shellfish Regulating Order which is due for renewal at the end of September 2024. The fishery is managed using total allowable catch (TAC) fishery based on annual surveys from which the stock biomass is determined. The annual survey is backed-up by 30 years of survey data providing a long-term time series from which stock trends can be determined and are used to inform the management regulations. The cockle survey is at the top of our research agenda supporting both the Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery Order (TECFO) and "Outside" permit cockle fisheries. We produce a separate, detailed, annual cockle survey report and only highlights from the survey and catches are presented here.

Some highlights for 2023/2024 include an estimated a total of 5146.9 million cockles spread over 56.2 km² of the Maplin Sands - the main cockle beds. We collected 1208 samples collected in spring and a further 202 samples in autumn 2023. A fishing quota of 5082 tonnes was set prior to opening the TECFO (Thames Estuary Regulation Order) fishery. The Total Allowable Catch (TAC) was set at 432 tonnes for the Permit fishery which was open between 11 September – 6 October.



Success Criterion 5: Evidence and Science Report

Native oysters

Native and Pacific oysters are fished throughout the district, with private fisheries primarily based in rivers like the Swale, Crouch, Roach, Colne, and Blackwater, while wild fisheries operate offshore along the North Kent coast and in deeper subtidal areas east of the Barrows. Since 2013, native oysters have been a designated feature of the Blackwater, Crouch, Roach, and Colne (BCRC) Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ), protected under the BCRC MCZ Native Oyster Fishery Flexible Permit Byelaw.



The native oyster fishery within this MCZ is currently closed, as it has not met the qualifying management plan conditions, which require a population of 800 tonnes with clear evidence of sustained growth. In 2023, KEIFCA assessed the oyster population with 134 towed samples, finding only 81 native oysters across 29 tows—indicating a further notable decline compared to the years 2014-2019, when recorded numbers were five to six times higher. KEIFCA also assisted ZSL in a survey off the Isle of Sheppey as part of a marine programme aiming to identify suitable sites for native oyster restoration. The survey recorded 593 native oysters from 57 tows, providing important data to guide the identification of restoration areas in the Thames.

Philip Haupt, Lead Scientific Officer

Success Criterion 5: Evidence and Science Report

Whelks in Hot Water – A Significant Seawater Temperature -Induced Mortality Event on the Kent Coast

The commercial whelk fishing fleet uses pots to fish throughout Kent and Essex district from Dungeness to Walton on Naze, on which many local fishers rely especially outside of summer months.

In 2022, a significant mortality event affected whelk (*Buccinum undatum*) populations in the Thames Estuary (Woods & Haupt, 2022, Fishing News, December 2022). This impacted a vast area—327 km² of shallow subtidal beds—along the northern Kent coast (Figure 1), with widespread reports from fishers of moribund and dead whelks appearing in pots.

The event sharply reduced whelk landings along the north Kent coast; there were no catches reported in August or September 2022, and significantly reduced landings from October to December 2022 and into early 2023. This was mirrored in a steep decline in catch per unit effort (CPUE—catch weight standardised by fishing effort). The declines caused financial strain on local fishers, with some displaced to other areas and others leaving the fishery.

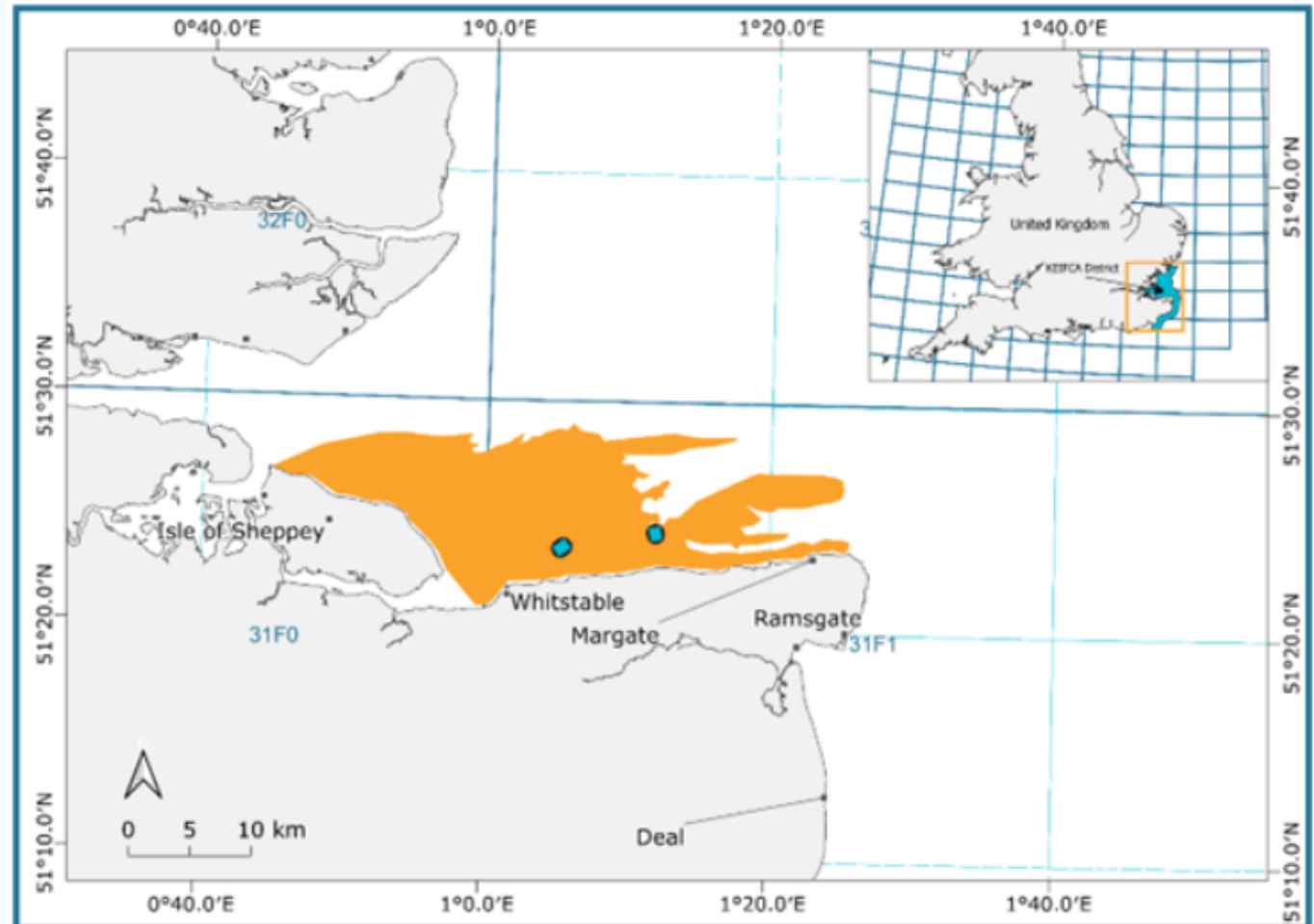


Figure 1. Map showing the affected subtidal area (327 km²), where moribund and dead whelks were found on the Kent North Coast in the Thames Estuary, North Sea, UK in the summer of 2022. Inset shows location of Kent and Essex IFCFA district in the United Kingdom. Map grid represents ICES statistical rectangles and sub-rectangles.

Success Criterion 5: Evidence and Science Report

CEFAS examined whelks from the affected area and found necrotic tissue in their gills, though no toxins or concerning diseases were detected. This led KEIFCA, with Environment Agency support, to investigate water quality data. The strongest evidence linked the mortality event to sustained above-average water temperatures. Whelks, a boreo-arctic species, prefer temperatures between 3–18°C; however, in summer 2022, temperatures exceeded 20°C for 60 days—the highest number since satellite records available from 2007 (Figure 2).

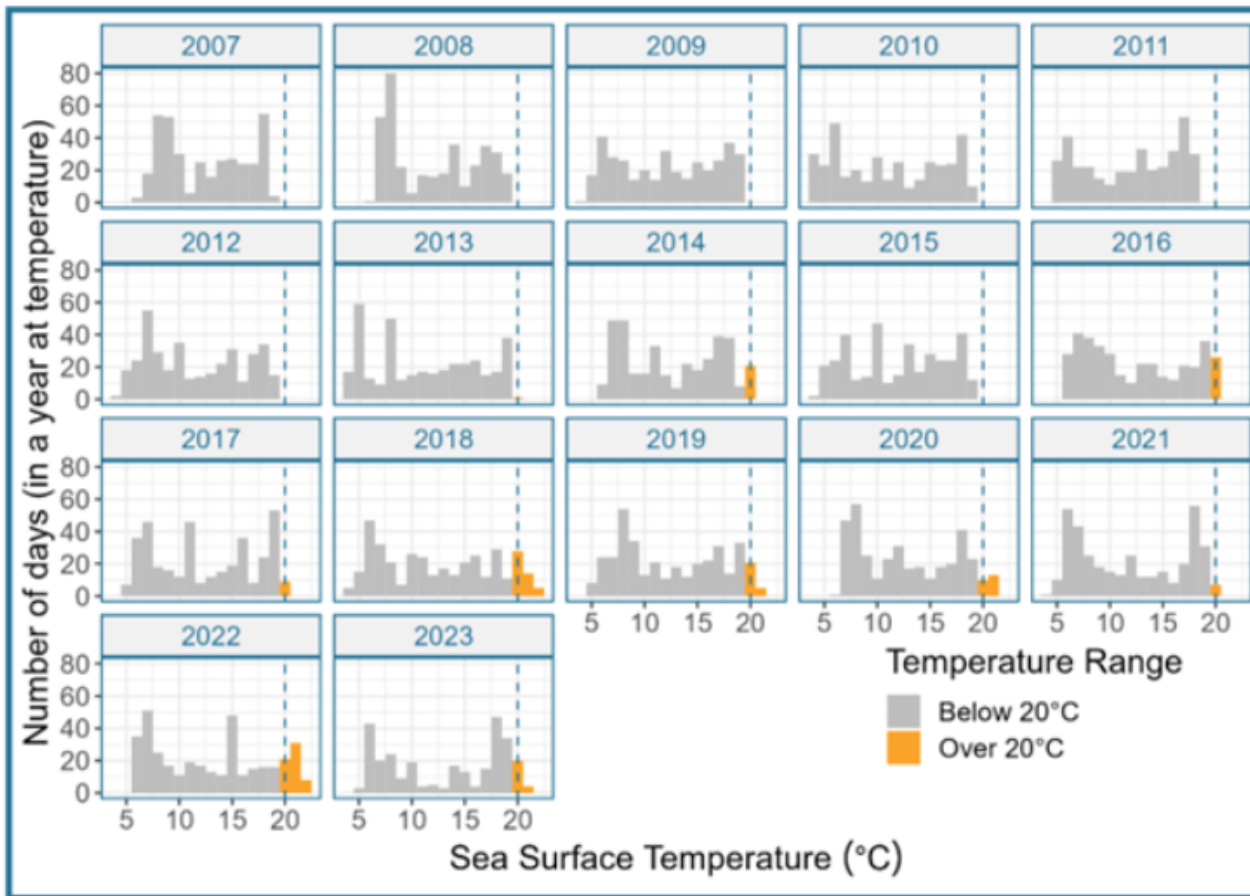


Figure 2. Graphs showing the number of days at a given sea water temperature using nighttime Sea Surface Temperature (SST) from Pathfinder Satellite data between 2007 and 2023. Dashed line indicates 20°C, grey bars represent number of days below 20°C, and yellow bars represent the number of days above 20°C.

In collaboration with industry, KEIFCA conducted a seasonal mark-and-recapture study to track whelk abundance, monitor population changes, and record sea temperatures in pots (Fishing News, March 2023). KEIFCA also commissioned the University of Essex to measure metabolic stress in whelks exposed to elevated temperatures under laboratory conditions. The study revealed increased mortality, reduced egg-laying, and signs of metabolic breakdown with rising water temperatures. This ongoing research aims to clarify the implications of projected sea temperature increases under climate change and contributes to the UK Government's Coastal Health & Livelihoods (CHLE) project.

In 2023 we recorded a steady recovery, with whelks migrating back into the estuary from neighbouring areas, though not from new recruitment, as indicated by spatial and size analyses. Despite positive signs, the whelk population and fishery remain vulnerable to future warming events. Whelks may serve as indicators of temperature-stressed marine environments, underscoring the need for adaptive strategies to protect marine species and coastal communities from the impacts of climate change.

Philip Haupt, Lead Scientific Officer

Success Criterion 5 – Outputs

Action	Completion Status	Outputs Completed	Next steps
ONGOING ACTION: 5A) Produce an annual Research Plan accompanying annual report		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual Research Plan and Report produced & reported to Authority 	
ONGOING ACTION: 5B) Attend and contribute to TAG meetings		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actively contributed to IFCA TAG meetings & presented at TAG symposium hosted in Jersey Represented TAG at WMG meetings 	
ONGOING ACTION: 5C) Maintain scientific survey equipment		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> KEIFCA vessels and equipment provided and maintained for the purposes of scientific surveys and data collection Vessel status reported to Authority at quarterly meetings 	
ONGOING ACTION: 5D) Engagement with major marine developments in the district and reply to consultations		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vehicles provided and maintained for shore based scientific surveys and data collection Planning and reporting to the Authority carried out. 	
ONGOING ACTION: 5E) Evidence gathering and reporting for the licenced and permitted cockle fisheries		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delivered cockle survey, data analysis and management recommendations. Held pre-fishery stakeholder meeting (License holders): Produced and distributed cockle papers and annual report Provided cockle samples for MESL. Production of Habitat Regulations Assessment, including consultation with NE and subsequent advice. 	
ONGOING ACTION: 5F) Evidence gathering and reporting for the whelk permit fishery		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysed data and prepared annual whelk landings report 	Commence surveys in 2022-2023



Objective completed



Significant progress made but objective not completed



Minimal progress made

Action	Completion Status	Outputs Completed	Next steps
ONGOING ACTION: 5G) Evidence gathering for a potential clam fishery		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertook clam in conjunction with cockle survey. • Helped scope out evidence needs of a new clam fishery and feed into Authority papers. • Liaise with Natural England on scope of trial and complete an HRA. • Work with officers and industry to set up onboard sampling programme 	
ONGOING ACTION: 5H) Evidence gathering and reporting on the potential native oyster fishery in the BCRC MCZ		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued membership of ENORI • Delivered CEFAS oyster survey • Delivered native oyster survey, analysed data • Prepared native oyster survey database • Produced oyster paper and delivered stock management recommendations to Authority 	
ONGOING ACTION: 5I) Provide support for small fish surveys		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joined Shore search and IFM small fish survey in Kent 	
5J) Undertake a <i>Sabellaria</i> validation survey in Goodwin Sands MCZ		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepared evidence to inform management measures for Goodwin Sands MCZ 	



Structure of the Authority

The formation of the Authority

The Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Order 2010 makes provision for the establishment of the Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation District and for the Authority for that district. The Order lays out the membership and proceedings of the Authority and makes provision in relation to the expenses of the Authority and to the reimbursement of members' expenses.

The Order states that the Authority is to consist of 21 members. The Order also makes clear the number of councillors to sit on the Authority (9) the number of "general members" or MMO appointees (10) (of which one member must be an employee of the MMO) and 2 "additional members" drawn from the Environment Agency and Natural England. The Order also lays out how the expenses of the Authority should be divided between the councils.

Relevant Council	Number of members	Percentage payment of KEIFCA levy
Essex County Council	3	43.12%
Kent County Council	3	43.12%
Medway Council	1	7.55%
Southend on Sea Borough Council	1	2.42%
Thurrock Council	1	3.79%

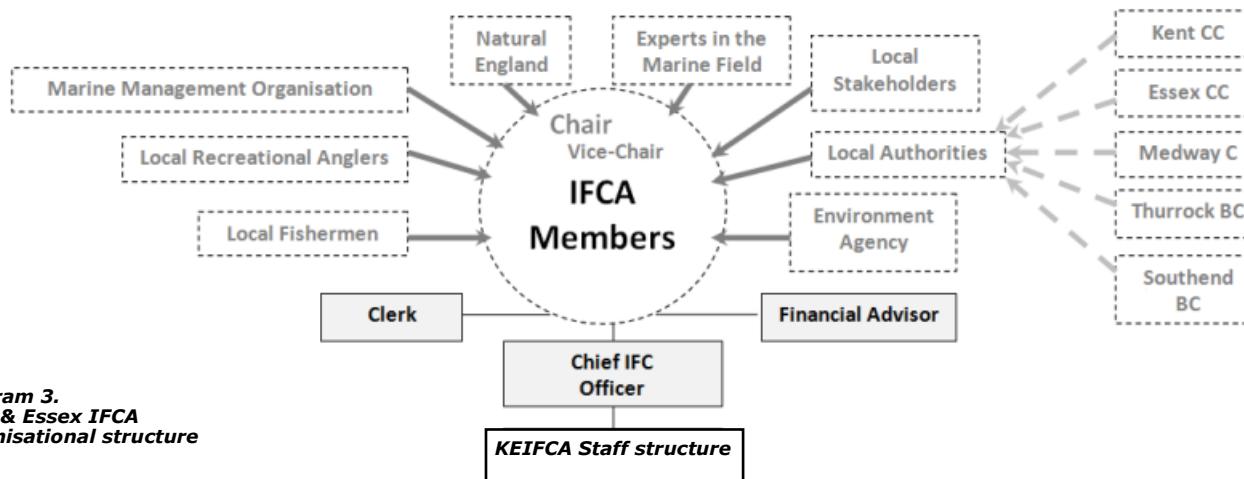
Since the 1st April 2011 local councils have annually received 'New IFCA Burdens' money from Defra via the area based local government grant. This funding is intended to help KEIFCA meet its new duties as stated in MCAA 2009.

List of Members (**Chairman, *Vice-Chairman)

**Cllr John L Lamb	Southend BC	Cllr Jane Fleming	Essex CC
Cllr Derek Crow-Brown	Kent CC	Cllr George Coxshall	Thurrock BC
Cllr Tony Hills	Kent CC	Cllr Simon Curry	Medway BC
Cllr Conrad Broadley	Kent CC	Mr Alex Baker	NE representative
Cllr Alan Goggin	Essex CC	Mr Justin Rowley	MMO representative
Cllr Michael Skeels	Essex CC	Ms Lindsay Faulkner	EA representative
*Mr P John E Nichols	MMO Appointee	<i>Commercial- finfish</i>	
Mr Peter Wexham	MMO Appointee	<i>Commercial - finfish</i>	
Mrs Esther Gilson	MMO Appointee	<i>Commercial - shellfish</i>	
Mr Richard Turner	MMO Appointee	<i>Marine environment and recreational fishing</i>	
Ms Tanya Ferry	MMO Appointee	<i>Marine environment and other</i>	
Mr Eden Hannam	MMO Appointee	<i>Marine Policy</i>	
Mr William East	MMO Appointee	<i>Recreational</i>	
Mr Craig Collins	MMO Appointee	<i>Recreational</i>	
vacancy			

Governance

Good governance is at the heart of sound decision-making and it is because of this that KEIFCA has already adopted or is about to adopt key working documents that will aid the smooth and transparent working of the Authority (i.e. Code of Conduct, Standing Orders, Financial Regulations, register of members' interests and a policy on Members' Allowances/Expenses). As well as this, KEIFCA has formally agreed to use Kent County Council for legal, constitutional, financial and HR support, as well as one-off support on procurement and other key activities.



Members

IFCA members are a vital component of helping KEIFCA deliver many of the key concepts expressed in the IFCA vision, but especially in helping to “secure the right balance between social, environmental and economic benefits to ensure healthy seas, sustainable fisheries and a viable industry”.

IFCA members attend the quarterly IFCA meetings, with some members also attending specialist Technical Panel meetings where specific issues are discussed in greater detail; recommendations from these meetings are then taken forward to the next full meeting of the Authority.

The member’s role within the organisation (Diagram 3) is to decide and comment on the strategy and direction of the organisation and to make key strategic decisions (e.g. agree budget, staffing levels, stock management measures, etc.).



Staff Structure

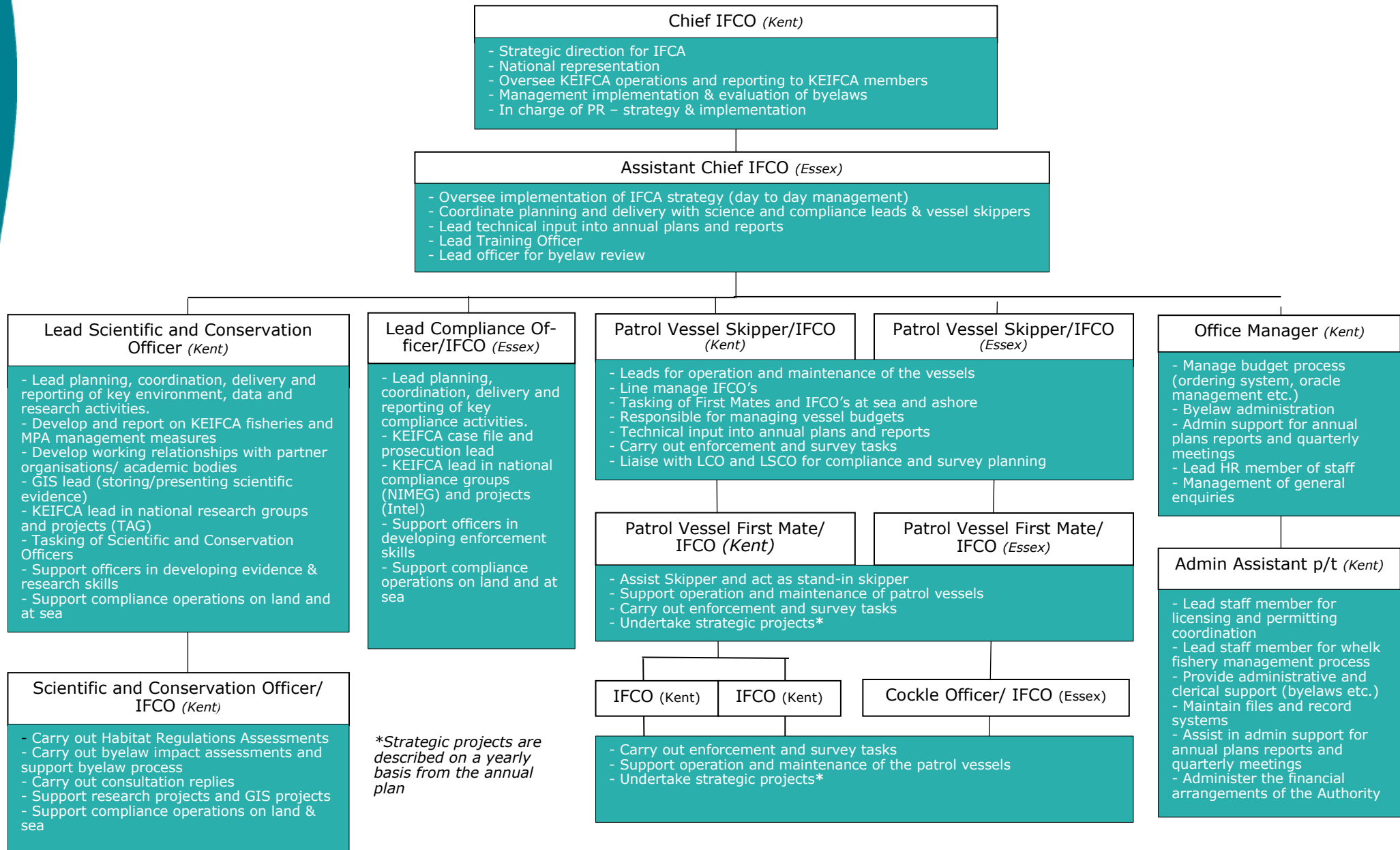


Diagram 4. Kent & Essex IFCA staff structure and key tasks

Staff

The officers and administration staff implement the strategic decisions that the Authority (i.e. members) have agreed. The IFCA staff, led by the Chief IFC Officer (Diagram 4), are responsible for the ongoing operations of KEIFCA (e.g. appointing staff, setting and managing staff performance, implementing the agreed stock management measures and enforcement etc.) and reporting back to the Members on key issues and matters for discussion each quarter.

At present KEIFCA employs 13 full time staff, 1 part-time staff a part time Clerk and a part time financial advisor. In addition to this the Authority also contributes to the services of the Chair and Vice-chair. The structure and key roles of each member of staff are laid out in Diagram 4. One of the areas that KEIFCA is continuing to develop in the organisation is the ability of each officer to take on each other's roles, and expand their knowledge base so that each officer is competent in a wide spectrum of roles and duties. This approach will give KEIFCA a huge amount of flexibility in being able to deliver all of its duties and to react to events.

Staff performance and assessment

KEIFCA currently apply a system used by Kent County Council (KCC) for staff performance monitoring. The system is based on a yearly review of an employee's performance using a series of objectives that are agreed between the employee's line manager and the employee. The objectives and the outputs of the employee relate back to the overall objectives in the annual plan. Dependent upon how well an employee meets, or exceeds, the targets set during this process, an employee may receive a small percentage increase related to their salary dependant on budgetary constraints and pay scale.

Training

Staff continue to work hard to gain the qualifications and experience they need in order to fulfil the functions of the IFCA. A number of new staff have started with the Authority of the previous year and all are working hard to develop the core understanding, experience and knowledge related to the range of work of the IFCA.

The quarterly tasking's process (where staff report on their progress every quarter and identify new goals), has developed into a useful tool to help both staff members and senior management prioritise work streams and identify key issues.

Important training areas include developing IFC officer enforcement and seamanship skills, building on survey skills within the organisation and developing officers' ability to undertake a range of surveys and help staff expand their IT skills (including using GIS and website maintenance). KEIFCA is leading IFCA national we hope that the next year will bring better training opportunities than ever for our team.



KEIFCA strategically working with partners

Joined up government

KEIFCA has worked in conjunction with the other IFCAs to develop MoUs with key public authority stakeholders. The MoUs layout in broad terms how KEIFCA will work constructively with the Marine Management Organisation, Environment Agency, Natural England and Centre for Environment, Fisheries & Aquaculture Science.

As well as the detailed MoUs the MMO, EA and NE shared objectives have been included in our annual planning process which means that the cooperation and coordination between agencies is hard wired into the system. KEIFCA is looking to build on this relationship to establish protocols of how information will flow between organisations using this mechanism.

Association of Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (AIFCA)

KEIFCA played an important part in the setting up and effective running of the AIFCAs. The Association is an important national body that allows all 10 IFCAs to speak with one voice at a national level on key topics. KEIFCA see that the Association can act as an important body in helping IFCAs coordinate their actions and resources efficiently.

Technical Advisory Group (TAG)

KEIFCA continues to support and work through the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) to help it achieve its aims:

- To improve the quality and extent of fisheries management information through better coordination and dissemination of fisheries related scientific research.
- Define and apply best practice relating to the scientific & technical functions and responsibilities of IFCAs.

National Inshore Marine Enforcement Group (NIMEG)

KEIFCA played an important part in the establishment of NIMEG. The purpose of the group is to bring together expertise in the field of regulation and enforcement within inshore fisheries and marine conservation in order to develop and support joint working and consistency; identify and share best practice; and to promote professionalism and competence.

Working with national and local associations and partnerships

KEIFCA continues to build on the current partnerships it has already developed with a wide range of organisations, ranging from fishermen's associations, wildlife trusts, coastal partnerships, harbour authorities to power stations. KEIFCA also sees the need to develop new working relationships with organisations affected by the remit of IFCAs and it is hoped that the communication strategy will help engage with these communities in a productive way. KEIFCA sits on a number of local and national management groups ranging from national enforcement working groups to local marine protected area management meetings. KEIFCA also strongly supports and contributes to the Shellfish Association of Great Britain as well as the Thames Estuary Partnership.

Stakeholder engagement, communication and consultation

Compliments and Complaints:

Over the past year three formal complaints or compliments were received, these were addressed using our complaints procedure and we have retained our complaints procedure to deal with any which may occur in future. Three Freedom of Information requests were received this year. All other issues have been addressed by the Authority as they have arisen.

Our people

We recognise that we rely on our staff to work with our stakeholders in delivering KEIFCA's objectives. We will:

- ensure our staff are trained and competent to deliver our services.
- ensure our staff treat every user of KEIFCA services as they would wish to be treated themselves, with respect, courtesy and understanding.
- train all staff to work constructively with stakeholders.

Reaching us

We will provide different ways to help people contact us and access the services they need. We will:

- make information about KEIFCA and its services easily available.
- publish opening hours and describe how to access services.
- Keep our website updated.
- provide a welcoming, friendly environment, easily accessible to all.

How we communicate

We want to make every contact a positive experience for our stakeholders.

We will:

- always listen carefully to what stakeholders and colleagues say and be polite and honest.
- give a contact name and details.
- let people know what will happen next.
- point people in the right direction if we can't help.
- provide a suitable environment and ensure confidentiality.
- write letters, emails and publications that are easy to read and understand.
- respond to letters and emails promptly and when that is not possible, we will send an acknowledgement with details of who is dealing with the matter.
- let people know if there will be a delay in responding.
- ensure answer-phone messages are clear and tell people when to expect a reply

Involving our stakeholders

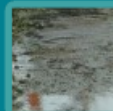
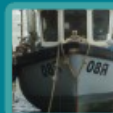
We will seek to understand what our stakeholders need, and develop our services around our stakeholders' expectations. We will:

- regularly ask stakeholders for their opinions.
- ensure that our stakeholders help shape the services we deliver.
- be honest about what we can and what we can't do.

Measuring how we perform

We want to make sure that our commitment to working closely with our stakeholders is making a difference, and we will assess our success by measuring what our stakeholders value. We will:

- seek regular feedback on stakeholder satisfaction.
- publish details of how stakeholders can tell us about complaints, pay compliments and give us feedback and investigate all complaints thoroughly, as quickly as possible, and learn from our mistakes (www.kentandessex-ifca.gov.uk).
- train all staff in core standards of behaviour and how to interact with stakeholders.
- continue our commitment to make 100% of our services (where appropriate) available electronically.
- respond where possible to all public enquiries within 10 working days.
- issue licences and permits within 10 working days of receipt of a correctly completed form.



KEIFCA Assets & Resources

2 offices

Main office in Ramsgate, Kent
Second office in Brightlingsea, Essex



2 patrol vessels



FPV Tamesis 12m, Brightlingsea
FPV Nerissa 17m, Ramsgate

2 RIBs

FPV Vigilant 8m, standalone RIB
FPR Nereus 4.5m, boarding RIB
launched from FPV Nerissa stern ramp



4 vehicles



2 Toyota Hilux's
2 VW Caddy's

Abbreviations

ACIFCO	Assistant Chief Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Officer	MaCAA 2009	Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009
AIFCA	Association of Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities	MCSS	Monitoring and Control Surveillance System
ASFC	Association of Sea Fisheries Committees	MCZ	Marine Conservation Zones
AA	Appropriate Assessment	MMO	Marine Management Organisation
CEFAS	Centre for Environment, Fisheries & Aquaculture Science	MoU	Memoranda of Understanding
CFP	Common Fisheries Policy	MSFD	Marine Strategy Framework Directive
CIFCO	Chief Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Officer	MPA	Marine Protected Area
Defra	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	MSC	Marine Stewardship Council
EA	Environment Agency	MSP	Marine Spatial Plans
ECC	Essex County Council	NE	Natural England
EFF	European Fisheries Fund	NIMEG	National Inshore Marine Enforcement Group
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment	nm	Nautical Miles
EIFCA	Eastern Inshore Fishing and Conservation Authority	RSA	Recreational Sea Angling
EMS	European Marine Site	RIB	Rigid Inflatable Boat
GIS	Geographical Information System	SAC	Special Area of Conservation
IFCO	Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Officer	SBC	Southend Borough Council
IFCA	Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority		
KCC	Kent County Council	SxIFCA	Sussex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority
KEIFCA	Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority	SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
LSCO	Lead Scientific and Conservation Officer	SPA	Special Protection Area
MC	Medway Council	TBC	Thurrock Borough Council
		TLSE	Test of Likely Significant Effect
MCA	Marine Coastguard Agency		

Meeting our duties

The Marine and Coastal Access Act, 2009 states:

(s.) **178** Annual Report

(1) As soon as is reasonably practical after the end of each financial year, every IFC authority must prepare a report on its activities in that year.

(2) A report under this section must be in such form and contain such information as the Secretary of State may require.

(3) A report under this section must be published in such manner as the Secretary of State may require.

A copy of the Marine and Coastal Access Act is available online at: www.legislation.gov.uk



Further Copies

This document can be downloaded from:
www.kentandessex-ifca.gov.uk

Alternatively a hard copy can be viewed at:
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