

KEIFCA Clam trial consultation – The Next Steps

Building on the 2024 clam trial that evaluated different types of fishing gear that could be used to harvest Manila clams, KEIFCA are running a consultation to provide feedback on the shape and nature of future trials. The feedback from this consultation will be summarised and considered at the next Authority meeting in May.

What do you think we should be aiming to achieve?

As we look to develop a fishery it is important to develop a clear idea of what we want the long-term future of the Manila clam fishery to look like. Crystallising these ideas will help shape future management decisions. Using feedback from stakeholders and 2024 trialists, officers have developed 3 vision statements.

Vision 1: Seek to create a thriving, sustainable Manila clam fishery that has a reputation for producing high-quality, environmentally responsible, local product through the use of low impact clam harvesting equipment and industry-led stewardship of clam beds.

Vision 2: A small-scale, sustainable Manila clam fishery that supports the local coastal community through the creation of a high-value local clam market, investment in local processing infrastructure, and the provision of skilled employment.

Vision 3: Strive to balance economic, social, and environmental needs; maintaining a long-term, lucrative Manila clam fishery that enhances the local economy, while safeguarding the wider ecosystem it relies on, resulting in a fishery with a reputation for high quality product.

1. Which vision statement do you think KEIFCA should use, and why?

Click or tap here to enter text.

2. If you would like KEIFCA to consider an alternative vision statement, please include your version below and highlight the components that you think would make this a strong vision statement.

Click or tap here to enter text.

Outline of the proposed trial

After listening to feedback from the 2024 trialists and considering evidential needs, it is proposed to run a 2-year trial (2025 & 2026). Running the trial over a longer period will help answer many key biological, fishing, economic and enforcement questions as well as provide an opportunity for the trialist to invest and commit to the trial with more confidence.

It is proposed that the trial would run over 6-8 weeks in the autumn and would primarily take place in the same areas as the 2024 trials (areas could change depending on stock surveys). The exact details including factors like the number of trips etc. will be calculated after surveys have taken place, with the final proposals submitted to the September Authority meeting.

As in the 2024 trial, the trialists will be able to sell their catch as a significant component of the trial will be assessing the economic viability of the fishery as well as the socio-economic opportunities of a potential clam fishery.

Any successful applicant will be required to contribute to the trial, attend in-person meetings in the district (up to 4 a year), supply all relevant trial data and sign-up to a code of conduct. All trialists will be required to use a vessel tracking system whilst taking part in the trial and will be withdrawn from the trial if found to be breaking any of the management conditions (exact details would be included in the code of conduct).

With a limited area set aside for the trial there is a difficult decision to be made regarding the number of trialists. Feedback from 2024 showed that over 40 fishers registered their interest in the fishery with 15 applying for the 8 places in 2024. With a successful trial in 2024, interest in this fishery has increased. In light of this, KEIFCA are consulting on whether to run the trial with 8 trialists/boats or increase to 10 trialists/boats. Each option has advantages and disadvantages and the final decision on numbers in the trial will also need to strongly consider survey evidence.

3. Do you have a view on the outline of the trial, or the number of trialists?

Click or tap here to enter text.

Outline of the proposed application process

KEIFCA intend to run an application process in June 2025. Applicants would have a month to fill in the application form, and then each application will be assessed by a nominated panel made up of KEIFCA members as well as external experts. The applications would be scored and ranked and offered to applicants in descending order until all the places have been allocated. A standby list of the next 4 applications will be kept on record and a trial offer will be issued if a trialist withdraws, again in descending ranked order. To spread the opportunity as widely as possible the intention would be to only accept one application per business (i.e. applicants with related companies would only be able to apply on behalf of one company).

The applicants will be required to fill in an application form that is split into 3 sections:

- 1) Outline of proposed clam fishing operation, that would be split into sections on the boat, the fishing gear, the sorting gear and landings/sales. - 30 MARKS
Higher marks would be given for photos of gear and clear descriptions

- 2) Outline of experience of fishing and landing in the Thames, fishing and landing shellfish as well as experience of working constructively in scientific trials or surveys. - 30 MARKS
Higher marks would be given to applicants that can show they have expert knowledge and significant, long-term, regular, and current experience for each of the components of the question.

- 3) Clam fishery development plan. - 40 MARKS
 - An overview of your commitment to the trial and plan to help collect evidence and develop a potential clam fishery over the next 2 years.
 - Details of intended markets for products and steps you propose to take to ensure your company maintains a high-quality product.
 - Details of how you or your processor intend to add any value to the catch and any plans to create new local markets
 - Details of how you will be supporting skilled local employment, local businesses and local investment.
 - Details of steps taken to reduce the impact of fishing operations on the clam stocks, the cockle stocks and the seabed.*Higher marks would be given to applicants that demonstrate exceptional experience, competence, and capability in delivering the key details and requirements of the plan whilst delivering value additional to the requirement in supporting local business and supply chains, adding value to the catch especially within KEIFCA district and supporting the wider community.*

4. Do you have any comments on the application process?

Click or tap here to enter text.

5. Do you have any comments on the application form or scoring of the applications?

Click or tap here to enter text.

After discussing the trial with our legal team, we need to make it very clear to all prospective applicants that taking part in the trial does not create or confer any legitimate expectation of future access to any possible clam fishery or to any future trials.

If these trials are successful and more trials are undertaken in the future it would be the intention of the Authority to run a new application process using criteria deemed relevant by the Authority, that would be open to all those that expressed an interest.