

Kent & Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

MINUTES of a meeting of the Authority held in the Marconi Room, Chelmsford Borough Council, Duke Street, Chelmsford, Essex on Tuesday 28 January 2025.

Present: Mr J Lamb (MMO), Mr J Nichols (MMO), Mr E Hannam (MMO), Mr P Wexham (MMO), Ms T Ferry (MMO), Cllr D Crow-Brown (KCC), Cllr T Hills (KCC), Mr W East (MMO), Mrs E Gilson (MMO), Cllr M Skeels (ECC), Cllr A Goggin (ECC), Cllr J Fleming (ECC), Mr R Turner (MMO)

Apologies: Cllr S Curry (Medway Council), Mr J Rowley (MMO), Cllr G Coxshall (Thurrock Council), Cllr C Broadley (KCC), Mr A Baker (NE), Mr C Collins (MMO)

In Attendance: Mr J Cook (Clerk, KCC), Ms S Martin (Financial Advisor, KCC), Dr W Wright (Chief Fishery Officer), Mr D Bailey (Assistant Chief IFC Officer), Dr P Haupt (Lead Science IFC Officer), Miss K Stuart (Science IFC Officer), Mrs K Woods (Admin Assistant), Mr H Hurst (Lead Enforcement Officer), Mrs D O'Shea (Office Manager)

By invitation: Dr S Coulthard (Newcastle University)

35. DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS (A1)

The Chairman requested Members to declare any interests and advised that those with disclosable Pecuniary Interests and Other Significant Interests may not vote on that Agenda item. The Chairman reminded Members that they could declare an interest either at this time or prior to the agenda item being discussed.

36. MINUTES

Members agreed that the minutes of the meetings held on 26 November 2024 were correctly recorded, and that they be signed by the Chairman. No matters were arising.

10:05 Cllr Hills arrived

37. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING (B1)

The Financial Advisor to the IFCA provided Members with details of the estimated financial outturn for the Authority as of 31 December 2024. An underspend of £28,359 was currently forecast, although this was subject to change as the year progressed.

Members were informed that the anticipated additional spend on maintenance for Tamesis had been offset by savings to the budgets of the other vessels and was now likely to come in on budget. A reduction in the forecast for fuel was also expected due to

Tamesis being out of water. With regard to the amount held for legal costs, Members were reminded that they had allocated a sum within this budget heading against the possibility of Judicial Review. Any amount not spent from the budget line would be held in reserves against the possibility of challenge in 2025/26. Members were provided with a detailed breakdown of the individual budget headings and any variance to that budget.

Members were provided with details of all reserves held by the IFCA.

In response to a question as to whether the underspend was likely to increase or decrease by the end of the financial year, the Financial Advisor stated that she was fairly confident that the figures were accurate and that there would not be a vast change to the predicted underspend. She thought it unlikely that there would be an overspend

Members **APPROVED** the forecast underspend of £28,359

38. DRAFT BUDGET 2025/2026 (B2)

The Financial Advisor provided Members with details of the draft budget for 2025/2026 which required an increase to the levy of 1.5%; with the addition of the Area Specific Grant from the Government this would provide a budget of £1,028,664

Members were provided with a summary and individual details of the increases and savings that were proposed.

Members were advised that the staffing budget had increased to reflect the cost of living increases as well as the move to new pay scales. Some pressure had been taken from the staffing budget by the DEFRA grant covering fully one post and partially another.

The new RIB would be coming into service in the 2025/26 year so this would see increases in both the Vessels and Supplies and Services budget headings.

Support Charges budgets in 2024/25 had been increased to cover a potential judicial review for the new T24 regulations. This budget was expected to be moved to Reserves at the end of the year and ring-fenced against any challenge in 2025/26. This had

resulted in the day-to-day support charges budget reducing but with the reassurance that the Authority could cover any costs that might arise if there were a judicial review.

Savings had also been made by the removal of one-off items budgeted for in 2024/25 and not needed in 2025/26; advertising for proposed byelaws for MPA management measures and website design.

Income from cockle permits would be included within the budget for the first time in some years. Income from the licence fees and surveys would be increasing.

The expected income from KCC held investments had been increased, however should there be a shortfall at year end this would need to be taken from the Reserves transfer budget which was set at £90,000.

Members were informed that the proposed levy increases had been sent to finance staff involved in budget setting at the precept authorities. No concerns had been reported back and in respect of most of the authorities the Financial Advisor had been made

aware that the proposed amounts were within the council tax base that has been allocated.

Members made the following comments:

- Keeping the budget under inflation was an achievement and was to be congratulated
- What was the reason for Southend not receiving a Specific Grant – in response the CFO stated that these payments were made direct to the Local Authorities by DEFRA. They were based on an equation that related to relative size, population and length of coastline. Southend did not receive one.
- Essex CC had meetings this coming week to set budgets. Should the Finance officers at the LAs be agreeing to increases without LA members approval? – in response the Financial Advisor stated that the various Finance officers had not agreed the increased levy. They had been provided with the figures that the IFCA were proposing to put to IFCA Members so that they could accommodate them within their budget setting process. The LA Finance officers had not agreed the increase, rather they did not foresee an issue within their budget setting. In future the Financial Advisor would copy the LA members in on correspondence to their LA Finance officers.

In addition, the Clerk to the IFCA advised Members that all LAs were in the process of finalising their budgets. An early exploration of finance was undertaken to see how much money was viable. The final decision on the LA budgets would not be made until LA Members agreed them.

- What effect will devolution have on the IFCA – in response the Financial Advisor stated that it was likely to change the way the IFCA was funded. The Chairman added that it was possible that it could change the number and make up of LA Members.

Members **AGREED** the draft budget of £1,028,664 and the total levy payable by each Local Authority for 2025/2026 as follows:

• Kent County Council	£443,559
• Medway Council	£77,664
• Essex County Council	£443,559
• Thurrock Council	£38,987
• Southend-on-Sea City Council	£24,894

10:35 Ms Martin left the meeting

39. WHELK PERMIT BYELAW UPDATE (B3)

The CFO reminded Members that the IFCA had committed to providing a report every January to update Members on any issues within the fishery and to allow them to make changes to any of the management measures of appropriate. This report also looked at the landings of whelks within the neighbouring IFCA districts for comparison.

The LSCO informed Members that the whelk industry had had 2½ hard years following the whelk mortality event. Recovery had been slow but was happening. Prices obtained for whelks had increased from 2023 and were at £1,500 per tonne at the end of the year. Lynn Shellfish Ltd purchased the majority of the whelks with Chapmans of Folkestone the rest. Landings were still at half the quantities landed in 2022 and almost identical to the amounts landed in 2023.

Within the areas that were fished, Area 2 appeared to be fished more than in 2023. Area 3 was beginning to show increased landings which might suggest the beginning of a slow recovery from the mass mortality event in August 2022. The area with the highest catches was in Area 4. Total landings from Area 1 (Essex coast) had increased which appeared to be as a result of a Whitstable based fisher targeting that area.

Catch per unit effort (CPUE) for the 2024 fishery was similar to the previous year.

Members were advised that compliance with the Byelaw had been good. Three minor offences had been dealt with by way of a verbal warning. One had resulted in a Financial Administrative Penalty, and another was still under investigation.

The LCSO reminded Members that the IFCA had entered into partnership with Essex University in 2022 to study the effects of water temperature on whelks. This work was continuing with results shared with officers.

In response to a question from a Member on whether the research had found a reason for the mass mortality, the LSCO stated that it did appear that sustained high temperatures were a factor in that this had stressed the whelks and caused the die back. Although temperatures had been high since that time, they had not remained at those levels for a similar significant amount of time.

The CFO informed Members that the IFCA continued to monitor sea temperatures through temperature loggers in whelk pots. In addition, KEIFCA was involved in a CEFAS led coastal health project which was a multi-agency project involving 3 x IFCAs, the MMO, FSA and CEFAS set up as a result of crustacean mortality in the Tyne. Government funding had been made available for 2024/25 and CEFAS was applying for funding for 2025/26.

In response to a question from a Member regarding feedback from the research being undertaken, the LSCO that the IFCA had been trying to set up a PhD but Essex university had pulled back from this following an unsuccessful application for funding. He had been reassured by the student carrying out the original research that this is still ongoing and would ask whether he could present on his work at a meeting of the IFCA.

Members **AGREED** that the pot limit, the riddle size and the number and size of escape holes should remain set at:

Pots – 300 for category 1 permits and 10 for category 2 permits

Riddle – 25mm spacing between bars

Escape holes – 10 @ 25mm per pot

40. AN ENGLISH WHELK PERMIT – SEAFISH DRAFT DISCUSSION PAPER (B4)

Members were advised that the Whelk Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) had been published in December 2023. One of its key proposals was to introduce a permit scheme or licence entitlement to allow adaptive management to take into account local stocks and fleets and to control effort. A Whelk Management Group (WMG) had been created to consider how this would be achieved. Seafish, an industry body, was in charge of the WMG which was made up of members of the fishing industry, IFCAs and academics. There had been challenges in obtaining input from inshore fishers.

Following workshops and meetings with Industry, Seafish had published a draft discussion paper in December 2024 (provided to Members with their papers). The ambition of Defra and SEAFISH was that following a further round of engagement the proposed paper would be finalised and delivered to Defra and the MMO with the intention of it being made into legislation.

The CFO advised Members that this was a new process not undertaken before and it was unclear at what point fishers should feed in. The paper discussed not only UK stock but also stock that EU boats would fish. Although not discussed in the FMPs, the UK government had to apply the same processes to EU boats as to UK boats. Ms Gilson had attended meetings with Seafish on behalf of Industry and the CFO had attended as a lead on behalf of the IFCAs.

The CFO advised Members that he had major concerns over the proposals put forward by Seafish. Fishers needed flexibility and also a route for younger fishers to enter the industry. At present whelks were a low investment fishery and the ease of access to it was a critical feature. The proposals as they stood put barriers to that access. IFCAs in their management measures introduced minimum sizes, restrictions on numbers of pots, daily takes and maximum takes as a way of controlling the amount of stock taken from the fishery. The draft paper didn't do this. It created a barrier to entry but didn't have any mechanism to measure the stock taken. Officers had helped to arrange a meeting between the Seafish Whelk Permit leads and local whelk fishers at Whitstable in August 2024 and had also met separately with those fishers on 8 January 2025 to discuss the draft paper. These meetings raised very strong objections to any form of limited permit or entitlement. Members were informed that subsequently Seafish held an online meeting with fishers from around the country when the Whitstable fleet had reiterated their opposition to a limited entry fishery.

The CFO reiterated that the key concerns were one of access to the fishery to allow local fishers an entry in. Any limitations needed to be made clearer. Local whelk fishers had presented their own ideas and they should be listened to.

Members made the following comments:

- Cannot see any merit in these proposals
- The trade and cooperation agreement (TCA) review in 2026 is creating a lot of work. Some of the measures suggested within this draft will provoke EU members and were unlikely to be welcomed. Would be very cautious about proposals that created new barriers before 2026 because of the TCA review. At the time of Brexit the trading cooperation at that time set out rules on how to sell in to the EU, how quotas were set and how to resolve disputes. This will be reviewed in 2026. The French do not like our marine reserves and are aggrieved more than other nations. The UK does not want to give the French more reasons to dislike procedures and influence other member states.
- Fishing licences used to say "all methods". Thirty years ago 80 to 90% of any income was from cod, now it is whelks. If not careful then Seafish and the MMO will be dictating what can be caught on the licence. If the species change and fishers want to catch something else they will not be able to as they will not have a track record. Industry must be extremely careful and set out what they want and will be prepared to accept

Members **NOTED** the report

Members were provided with a presentation by Dr Sarah Coulthard, a marine social scientist based at Newcastle University on the background to the work she had undertaken to produce her report "Securing Sustainable Inshore Fisheries in the UK", copies of which were provided to Members

Members asked the following questions:

- Was there any reason why climate change was not recorded in the report as a concern – in response Dr Coulthard said that this had been brought up at the workshop but was not included within the top priorities as it had not been seen by the attendees as the most urgent. The priorities were from the people in the room and the report needed to be true to how they presented these.
- The Vice Chairman informed Members that he had attended the workshop in Poole. This was by far the best that he had participated in and in his opinion if anyone could change the opinion of the MMO, Defra and Seafish it would be the work of Dr Coulthard.

41. MANILA CLAM FISHERY UPDATE (B5)

Members were provided with a copy of the public summary report for their approval. The Science Officer (SO) informed Members that since the last meeting officers had conducted post-trial interviews with seven of the eight trialists. NE had been updated with the initial results of the trial and what the plans were for next year's trial. NE had not raised any concerns and KEIFCA planned to continue working closely with them to ensure all trials were compatible with the conservation objectives of the MPAs within the trial areas. The results from this trial had indicated that a Manila clam fishery may be viable in the Thames Estuary, but that further trials and input from Natural England would be necessary. KEIFCA intended to run a bottom impact experiment, a riddling experiment, and another trial fishery at the end of 2025.

With regard to the trials undertaken, three types of fishing gear were used, suction dredge, water injection dredges and dry dredges. Of these water injection dredges proved to be the most suitable gear for harvesting clams with low damage rates.

The range of riddles designed and constructed for use in the trial were effective at sorting undersized clams from the catch, allowing them to be discarded and legal catch to be landed. Cockles were rarely retained while harvesting Manila clams.

All trialists that landed commercial quantities of catch were able to sell the entirety of it, with catch being sold to the live market for either relaying or further processing for consumption. The UK market was able to sustain the entirety of the catch produced in the trial, with the potential for market growth over time.

1pm Cllr Fleming and Cllr Crow-Brown left

Members asked the following questions:

- How long did the clams survive following harvesting – in response the SO stated that they appeared to be very hardy, with some surviving 10 days
- Water injection dredge – would all future fisheries trial take place in the same substrate as currently fished in. If there were muddier areas then the impact would be different– in response the CFO stated that if clams were found in different areas then they would require different assessments, dependent on the designation of those sites. If clams were found in muddier sediments then different techniques may be required.
- Setting up depuration tanks in the District, how quickly would you see this as a growth opportunity for the fishermen – in response the CFO said that that a huge amount of the value was from onward processing as well as quality control. The IFCA would encourage the development of this facility within the District.
- With regard to the feedback on the time it took to set up gear prior to the trial and the cost. Would the riddle study take place before the trial in order to give fishermen time to set up new riddles and how could this be done without clams going through them – the CFO advised that the IFCA had clams that they would

use to undertake the riddle trial. Officers had spoken to fishermen about the type of gear they had prior to the meeting. They were looking at a standard bar size and then a more elaborate one. Fishermen had been very cooperative with this. This would be seen as a priority to complete before the next trial.

- We are being asked to agree a trial in 2025. Would this be under the same parameters as the 2024 trial?
- Would the IFCA give guarantees to the 2024 trialists to participate in the 2025 trial? – in response to these questions, the CFO stated that he was asking Members to agree in principle to the trial and that the details of it would be brought before them in March to discuss.
- If the fishery was moving towards a commercial one, would the HRA need to consider overwintering birds – in response the CFO stated that this had been discussed with the NE shellfish team and the IFCA would continue to brief them on this.

Members **NOTED** the report and **AGREED** the following:

- i. A 2025 trial fishery focussing on fleet level impacts and understanding of the fishery;
- ii. Further experiments and trials focus only on water injection batch dredges;
- iii. Cockle data continues to be collected throughout future trials; and
- iv. A standard riddle bar spacing be carried through to future trials, the specification subject to the results from the riddle study.

42. REMOTE ELECTRONIC MONITORING (REM) APPLICATIONS IN THE KEIFCA DISTRICT (B6)

The Lead Compliance Officer (LCO) provided Members with a presentation providing an overview of the uses of REM currently and in the future. REM had been developed as a fisheries monitoring tool over the last twenty years and had been used in other countries as a compliance measure and for data collection for a number of years. The term REM referred to integrated on-board systems that could include cameras, gear sensors, video storage, and Global Positioning System (GPS) units. These combined systems could capture videos, positions, speed, bearing, gear deployment and other information to monitor fishing activity remotely.

Members were advised that in the UK Defra was consulting on a national rollout of REM which would prioritise larger commercial vessels. Defra had indicated that they would be supportive of KEIFCA and other IFCA's using REM at a local level for specific fisheries.

In addition, NE had carried out research on the use of REM in inshore fisheries. Their report had identified the KEIFCA cockle dredging vessels as high priority for REM installation.

The LCO advised Members that cockle fishing in the Kent and Essex IFCA district used suction dredges that were widely considered to be relatively high impact. The fishery took place within multiple MPAs which required HRA approval from NE, and for this to be approved NE had to have confidence in compliance, monitoring and calculation of seabed impact. The fishery was currently monitored through a combination of physical observation and electronic tracking. Physical observations of fishing activity were made by patrol vessels crews at sea which were unable to directly monitor all areas of the Thames. The IFCA used an older form of electronic tracking technology called Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS); however, the scope of VMS derived data was far more limited than that of REM systems.

Members heard that the Thames cockle vessels were relatively large inshore vessels at 14m which used potentially high impact gear inside an area with tight spatial management and multiple MPAs. They also operated in a high value, exclusive fishery with a limited number of licences, and as such, these vessels were considered to be candidates for the initial rollout of REM in the KEIFCA district.

During the 2024 TECFO two licenced operators agreed to trial REM devices on their vessels. These devices were provided by two companies: Fastview360 and Rewire Security. This device incorporated a tracking device similar to VMS but with a far higher resolution. It additionally comprised Bluetooth gear sensors to detect when the dredge was deployed or retrieved from the water, and CCTV cameras which recorded real time footage of the dredge, riddle and hold.

Members were advised that the results from the trial on the two cockle vessels were extremely promising, with the devices providing high-resolution tracking data and accurate gear in water detection which was corroborated by high quality video footage of the fishing gear. The aim was to roll out REM across the entire cockle fleet. From an enforcement standpoint, it was felt that REM would be likely to improve compliance and provided the best possible evidence in future investigations, while reducing the need for costly FPV patrols to monitor the cockle fleet at sea. REM would also be able to provide accurate data on fishing effort and catches, which can in turn be used to implement increasingly flexible spatial and temporal management measures that would be simply unworkable without this technology. Vessel owners would also have the option of installing additional cameras to improve the safety of the crew and vessels and reduce downtime, with the possibility of live streaming mechanical issues to engineers ashore to help problem solve and keep the vessel at sea.

The LCO advised that there were installation and upkeep costs. The IFCA would look at options to fund the purchase and installation of the hardware across the Thames cockle fleet to try and minimise financial burden on licence holders. The aim would be to have devices installed across all licenced vessels on a voluntary basis during the course of the 2025 fishery, with a view to bringing in a licence condition in 2026 to mandate that all

licenced cockle vessels must be fitted with a functional REM device to participate in the fishery.

Members **NOTED** the report

43. UPDATE ON NEW CABIN RIB (B7)

The ACFO advised Members that Ribcraft were providing weekly progress reports on how the build was progressing. It was running slightly behind schedule and was expected to be ready for delivery on 29 May 2025.

The boat required a name in order to start progressing the relevant paperwork with the MCA. As the vessel would be based in Brightlingsea it was proposed that she be named 'Nemo' due to the connection that Brightlingsea had with HMS Nemo during World War II where it served as the flag ship for the naval base in the town.

In response Cllr Goggin advised that Brightlingsea Town Council would be delighted to welcome a boat named for HMS Nemo and supported the proposal.

Members **NOTED** the report and **AGREED** the name of the new RIB would be 'Nemo'

44. MEETING DATES 2025/2026 (B8)

Members **APPROVED** the following meeting dates:

Tuesday 16 September 2025

Tuesday 25 November 2025

Tuesday 27 January 2026

Tuesday 19 May 2026

45. DRAFT ANNUAL PLAN 2025/2026 (B9)

Members were provided with the draft Annual Plan for discussion. They were advised this was a draft plan which would need to be submitted to the Secretary of State by 31 March 2025. Members were asked to provide any comments directly to the CFO.

Members **APPROVED** the 2025/2026 Annual Plan subject to any comments made to the CFO

46. MATTERS FOR REPORT (C1-C6)

Members received:

- Quarterly Report of the Kent IFCO (C1) – a Member noted that the report mentioned the Whitstable lobster hatchery. This was not something they had

heard of before – the CFO advised that they would look into it as not a lot was known about it.

- Quarterly Report of the Essex IFCO (C2)
- Quarterly Report of the Patrol Vessel 'Tamesis' and 'Vigilant'(C3)
- Quarterly Report of the Patrol Vessel 'Nerissa' (C4)
- Recreational Angling Report (C5)
- Enforcement Report (C6)

13:30 Meeting finished