

Cockle consultation.

As a representative of the fishing industry but having no pecuniary interest in cockles I feel free to make comment.

The management in my opinion is unfair and not environmentally friendly.

Cockles are a national asset and there should be access to fish to many not just a few. To limit fishing pressure only 14 licences were issued however this made a cartel a closed shop. Unfortunately, the way the licences were issued allowed for them to be sold on to other interests for apparently Millions of pounds.

I have recently been out to sea on cockle boats in the Wash, I was very impressed at the simple method of harvesting. Cockles were not damaged by being sucked up and then passing through a grader or riddle. They had not been stressed as our local ones are, grounds could be selected before harvesting to get the better-quality product. The size limit should also be reduced so there is even less waste and die off. Harvest less once, when using the dredge sometimes small cockles pass through the system many times, stressing the small cockles. You may hear argument about landing smaller cockles but the same buyers use and are happy with them from other ports?

What I did learn is that the beds should be monitored and managed by regular inspection working with the fishermen. Not from an office, on the ground management is needed.

Two tons per boat appears to work well.

This method is much less fuel dependant, possibly only one hour of high fuel usage of one engine compared to two engines running for several hours at high speeds. There would also be a benefit to steaming times as boats would go out with the ebb and back with the flood. This would stop the apparent chase to get in before the tide goes out.

I also think that this method is less noisy than our method, the Maplin's were a nursery ground for small flat fish but as the more modern cockle boats took over these small fish disappeared. In my opinion the intense noise levels have driven fish away.

In a modern age the method used in the Kent and Essex area is too industrial in a carbon reducing times.

We/you must also take into account the changing environment, clams and razor clams are taking over many sand banks. Likewise; gigas oysters are still spreading and it is not beyond possibility that the cockle fishery is threatened by invasive species. We/you need the ability to manage what is there and not centralise and concentrate on one stock.

I also feel the method of licencing needs to change. A permit to harvest cockles per individual not per boat. The permit would remain with the individual and be non-transferable. As long as a TAC is set does it matter how many vessels catch them?

The new permit possibly should be to harvest shell fish not just cockles, with the new species making inroads on the Thames's sandbanks perhaps we should be thinking ahead.

With electronic monitoring the boat would just register their intension to harvest this or that as they start the day.

The only time a dredge should or could be use is for deep water stocks on application but should we not leave some areas untouched?

I am willing to talk to any officer or committee member on the subject.

Thank you for give me the opportunity to voice my opinion.



NFFO executive committee member and vice chairman SE committee.