

By: KEIFCA Chief Fishery Officer

To: Kent & Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority  
– 14 June 2022

Subject: Consultation 1 summary

Classification Unrestricted

**Summary:** This paper outlines the engagement undertaken in Consultation 1 and provides details of the main headlines taken from these by officers. NB it is recommended that Members review the questionnaires held on the website together with the films made of individual stakeholders at the oral evidence hearings when considering this paper

**Recommendation:** Members are asked to:

1. **APPROVE** and **COMMENT** on the actions taken by officers to engage stakeholders in the Consultation 1 process
2. **REVIEW** and **COMMENT** on the consultation replies returned to the Authority as well as the films produced from the oral evidence hearings

## **Background**

Feedback from the Listening Phase showed there was a wide range of ideas and options put forward from different sectors of the cockle industry and the wider fishing community regarding the future management of the cockle fishery. Some proposals provided a very detailed framework clearly outlining areas of management; numbers of fishing vessels, gear type, access criteria and type of legislation. Other proposals provided a lot less detail but outlined important fundamental characteristics underpinning an option; the cockle areas managed under a new regulating order or the number of boats fishing in an area.

The options outlined in Consultation 1 built on the suggestions and proposals put forward in the Listening Phase. KEIFCA Members reviewed and discussed these proposals, reviewing questionnaire replies and oral evidence submissions as well

as legal advice and historic cockle fishery data. Using this information, Members then agreed detailed options that would be included in the main consultation document. The options not included were provided as an appendix to the consultation document which was also published on the website.

In addition to producing the consultation document, KEIFCA commissioned and compiled a series of reports that provided additional background information to help inform stakeholders and aid them in evaluating different options. These were put on our website <http://cocklereview.kentandessex-ifca.gov.uk/> and publicised in the consultation document. These include:

1. Spatial Distribution and Stock Review of cockles in the Kent and Essex district report.
2. Economic Performance Report – Seafish
3. Comparison of National Cockle Fisheries Report

### **Consultation 1**

Consultation 1 started on the 25 March 2022 with just over 200 emails being sent to stakeholders to notify them of this and the Consultation 1 document going live on the bespoke KEIFCA cockle consultation website. The oral evidence hearing was publicised in these emails and was held on the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> April at the Inn on the Lake just outside Gravesend. Throughout the process senior KEIFCA officers worked closely with current and former KEIFCA Members and members of the local fishing industry to make stakeholders aware of the consultation, to help fishers engage in the process and to answer any questions regarding the consultation. Additional effort was made to engage with fishers that had expressed an interest in the fishery in the previous Listening Phase, including re-sending emails or phoning up key individuals that could pass on information to others.

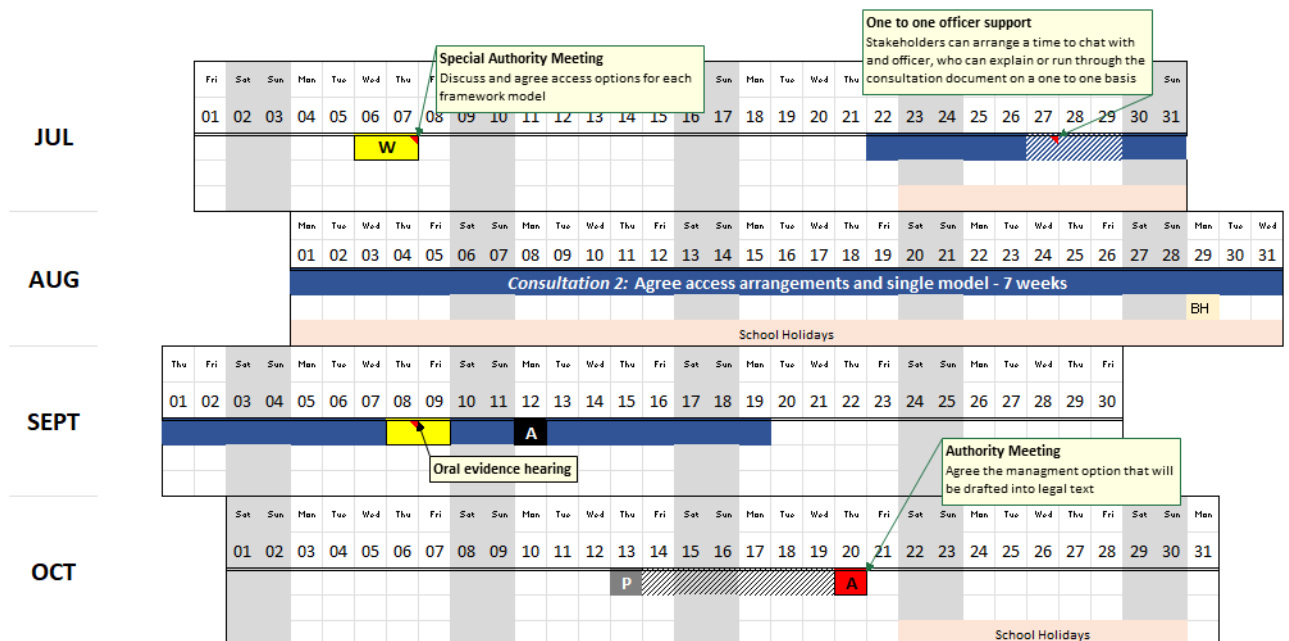
By the end of the six week consultation a total of 342 emails, 208 e-bulletins and 197 copies of the questionnaire were sent. Of the 19 bookings for the oral evidence sessions held, 14 people attended and a total of 49 written consultation responses were received. Consultation 1 finished on 9 May 2022.

In general, the engagement process seems to have gone well and we have had feedback from across the spectrum of the cockle industry as well as engagement with local finfish and shellfish operators. We would also like to thank IFCA Members who gave up their time to support the oral evidence hearing, Band Agency for putting in extra time and effort into the project and making the new website as well as SEAFISH for the Economic Performance Report. Special thanks also go to Fishery Officers Phil Haupt and Hayden Hurst for their reports.

## Planned changes to Consultation 2

Feedback from stakeholders suggested that the consultation document was too long and repetitive. Officers will endeavour to take these comments onboard and make changes to the Consultation 2 document.

In general, we are looking to only make minor changes to the planned Consultation 2 process, by moving the consultation dates forward by 10 days (22 July until the 19 September), and secondly by introducing three days at the beginning of the consultation where stakeholders can arrange a time to chat with an officer, who can explain or run through the consultation document on a one-to-one basis. One-to-one officer support is aimed at supporting stakeholders navigate the complex legal area of licence allocation, which the Listening Phase highlighted was poorly understood. Stakeholders will be able to book a specific time to talk to officers, either in person at the Ramsgate or Brightlingsea office, or over a Zoom/Teams/Facetime call. This session will just be used to explain the consultation document and answer any questions about the document. The one-to-one session will not collect evidence from stakeholders, with stakeholders told to either complete a consultation document or to attend an oral evidence session.



## **Technical evidence documents to support the decision-making process**

As well as collecting evidence from stakeholders there is a wealth of technical information that can be collated to help the Authority make informed management decisions. It is suggested that the document outlined below would be produced for the July 2022 Special Authority meeting and that this report would be made public and kept on the KEIFCA website.

### Review of environmental impacts of hydraulic suction dredging for cockles

This report will review the environmental impacts caused by using a hydraulic suction dredge to harvest cockles. Specifically, the report will describe how the suction dredge interacts with the seabed and will draw from case studies in the literature to describe the impacts of the hydraulic suction dredge on the 1. sediment, 2. benthic biota, and 3. ecosystem processes.

Understanding this impact will help inform and shape discussions concerning the number of licenses issued within a future Thames Regulating Order, the potential environmental impact of different numbers of licences and the confidence of any assessments of potential impact.

## **Main headlines from the Listening phase**

The headlines below are a very brief summary and officers would strongly suggest that Members refer to individual pieces of evidence to form their own conclusions from the evidence submitted. A key component of Consultation 1, and the whole process of reviewing and developing management is creating a system where stakeholders can express their views directly to the KEIFCA members who will make the final decisions.

As with the Listening Phase oral filmed evidence from stakeholders can be viewed on our specific consultation website (<https://cocklereview.kentandessex-ifca.gov.uk/consultation-1>). Anonymised written evidence either in the form of consultation replies or as letters can also be viewed on our website, as well as summaries that compile all the answers to a section or framework option. The other papers submitted as part of this meeting address specific areas of feedback in much greater detail.

- Most respondents thought the vision was good but a significant number of cocklers that work in the current Regulating Order would like it adapted to include the term continuing or maintaining sustainability, reflecting the sustainable nature of the current Regulating Order.
- The vast majority of respondents supported KEIFCA developing a new Regulating Order. None of the replies objected to the development of a new Regulating Order.
- There was very strong support from across the spectrum of stakeholders for some type of small-scale fishery outside a new Regulating Order, with only

one reply indicating that their preferred option would be suction dredge only. Stakeholders produced a spectrum of small-scale suggested options as to how the area outside a Regulating Order could be fished.

- However, the small-scale trial received a mixed level of support and what can be best described as a lukewarm response from fishers that are not currently part of the cockle industry.
- Although the vast majority of the current TECFO fleet and permit fleet was supportive of some kind of small-scale fishery the minority view from this sector was that the trial would be expensive and time consuming.
- The trial received limited support from fishers taking part in the oral evidence process and officers only received a handful of enquiries asking for more details and discussing options.
- Of the fishers from outside the current cockle industry that did reply to the consultation 8 out of 13 fishers supported the proposal and said they would apply for a derogation.

### **Headlines for framework options**

- Out of all the options ARUBA received minimal support. The hand raking element was supported by a handful of replies however a large number of replies contained very strong objections to this proposal for a range of reasons including safety concerns, possible detrimental effect on tourism at Leigh and Southend and possible impact on the ground from 'prop' washing.
- GRENADA had some minimal support, but a significant number of comments reflected that the number of permits issued would be too low and exclusive.
- CAYMAN had a small minority of support, mainly from stakeholders based in the Wash. Responses wanting this option strongly advocated the issuing of 28 licences rather than the 15 to 20 as outlined in the consultation.
- JAMAICA was one of the most strongly supported options especially by fishermen who didn't currently work in the TECFO fishery and by some fishermen who work in the current permit fishery.
- The other frameworks with a significant amount of support were the BERMUDA and HAITI options, which maintain the current TECFO boundaries. Although there was less support for either a small-scale trial or a suction dredge only fishery, there was a very significant amount of support for some type of small-scale permit fishery outside the current regulating order boundary building on the current permit byelaw legislation.

- Apart from the respondents advocating the CAYMAN option, the vast majority of replies did not support an increase in issuing more licences in a new regulating order; instead, the large majority of both current licence holders, permit holders and inshore fishers currently not working in the cockle fishery supported keeping the number of licences issued to 14.

**Recommendation:** Members are asked to:

1. **APPROVE** and **COMMENT** on the actions taken by officers in the listening phase summary
2. **REVIEW** and **COMMENT** on the questionnaires returned to the Authority as well as the films produced from the oral evidence hearings