

By: KEIFCA Chief Fishery Officer

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

Subject: Agreeing a final vision statement and evaluation criteria to
use in the process of developing future cockle fishery
management

Classification Unrestricted

Summary: This paper outlines the process KEIFCA has followed to create a vision statement and evaluation criteria, provides feedback from stakeholders on the proposals, and outlines a series of new possible wordings for the Authority to vote on.

Recommendation:

Members are asked to:

1. **DISCUSS** and **VOTE** for the final wording of the vision statement; and
2. **APPROVE** the wording of the evaluation criteria.

1. Vision Statement background

The vision statement aims to capture and briefly summarise what the cockle fishery might look like in the future, including any key concepts or principles that would underpin how the fishery should be managed. If we don't know where we are going, how can we get there?

Building on feedback from the Listening Phase, initial versions of the vision statement were proposed at the November 2021 Authority meeting and reviewed at the February 2022 Authority meeting, with the results consulted on as part of the Consultation 1 process.

The vision proposed in Consultation 1:

"KEIFCA will seek to sustainably manage the cockle fisheries and wider ecosystem in KEIFCA district and support a viable cockle industry, recognising its important long-term contribution to coastal communities and providing skilled employment."

Feedback from Consultation 1

The proposed vision statement has received a significant amount of engagement and comment from stakeholders during the Consultation 1 process. Feedback from the oral and written evidence suggested the proposed vision wording captured many of the key issues stakeholders felt were important. However, a common theme from a large number of replies was that the vision should also reflect the long-term stability and success of the TECFO cockle fishery and should include words like maintain or continue to sustainably manage the cockle fishery.

As outlined in the consultation document the vision statement aims to capture a clear idea or vision of what we want the long-term future of the cockle fisheries in the whole district to look like, not just the current cockle fishery within the Regulating Order (TECFO). Feedback across a spectrum of stakeholders during the Listing Phase suggested that the current permit fishery does not work very well in its current state.

1. Please provide any comments you may have regarding the vision for the future of the cockle fisheries within the KEIFCA District

TECFO

- I feel it should also mention preserving centuries of tradition, which have brought the fishery to its place today. The statement is also written in a manner which suggests that what you are trying to achieve will create a vibrant ecosystem, both ecologically and economically. What the vision fails to mention is that the current regulating order has successfully achieved said goals and has a track record of doing so spanning three decades, therefore the principal objective of the vision should be to safeguard this success, while implementing some improvements, if found necessary and practical by this consultation.
- I am sure you have the interest of the commercial fishing industry at heart, whatever you decide it will be difficult to please everyone.
- The vision of the future of the cockle fishery is to keep the existing 14 licences in the existing TECFO area, alongside a more productive fishing permit fishery with limited fishers. We are already the most sustainable cockle fishery in Europe. It needs to stay that way but only by keeping the existing fleet the same. We have been awarded MSC accreditation as a cockle fishery two years ago which reinforces the sustainability of it as a fishery.
The existing fleet has been fished by multi generations of the same families passing down to the

existing fishers leading to many years of experience and local knowledge which facilitates the sustainability of the fishery.

Any potential new fishers would not have the expertise or local knowledge, leading to potential over fishing of some areas and long term damage to the grounds. The idea is to keep the TECFO the same and that we sustain our MSC accreditation status for the next generation of fishers, who will look after and nurture the fishery as has been done so for generations by their predecessors.

The permit fishery is the one that needs to be better managed and made viable as a small scale fishery. This would look like a fishery for local inshore fleet for vessels of any size up to 14m. They could use any gear type as long as it fished from the vessel and meets the 10% breakage rate rule. **(2 responses - 042202, 050604)**

- The Vision Statement should also encompass the past 27 years **(12 responses - 050602, 050607, 050608, 050702, 050703, 050706, 050707, 050708, 050803, 050804, 050806, 050908)**
- The vision statement does not reflect the success of the last 27 years. It gives the impression that we are starting something new that we haven't tried before.
- The Vision Statement should reflect the fact that the intent is to continue what has already been achieved
- The vision should be a statement showing the stability and success of the current cockle industry, underlining its importance and contribution to the local fishing communities, and that its current form should not be changed.
- Agree **(3 responses - 050904, 050905, 050906)**

CFFPB (Permit Fishery)

- KEIFCA already manages a sustainable fishery. The TECFO works well, and is a proven success. I want KEIFCA to develop the other areas, so they can be managed and fished effectively, without damaging the beds, increasing employment, and helping the community and serving local processors. **(2 responses 050605, 050606)**
- The Vision Statement should also encompass the past 27 years
- My view is to maintain a sustainable cockle fishery that Fishers who continue to show interest and commit financially in the Thames cockle Fisheries historically are given equitable and fair opportunities to fish either the current TECFO or CFFPB Fisheries in the future.
- My vision would be to see a fair fishery for genuine cockle fishermen who have fished decades the TECFO and CFFPB and also still see a sustainable fishery.
- I agree with the vision statement, but I think it also needs stating that the vision is to keep providing a fishery for the current cockle fishers in the TECFO and current permit byelaw who have been financially committed to this fishery.
- I agree with there vision but I feel they should also recognise the long term involvement in the fishery from not only local vessels but vessels which are located futher a field but have also made the effort and financial dedication to the fishery.

Other - catching sector

- Yes sounds good
- Sounds ok
- Emphasis on local people, equal opportunity
- Any vision should come from current cockle fishermen

Other sector

- The Vision Statement should also encompass the past 27 years

Comments made in this section not classed as "comments" on the vision

- I feel that licenses that have previously been sold should go back to be redistributed and the previous owners should not be allowed a new one. It should be looked at who is applying because they may have started a new company and be applying through a new company name
- As mainly a netting (75%) potting – crabs, lobsters (25%) it is important to have diverse fisheries to prosecute. For the last 25yr cockle fishermen can earn big money and then come into our fishery but we can't go the other way!! With cod moving north and bass restrictions and sole stocks struggling a small cockle catch of a few tons maybe a lifeline to replace what we have lost over the years through no fault of our own!
- I would like the opportunity to try cockle fishing as we have little else in the area to turn to.
- The future cockle fishery in my opinion must be managed in a fair and proportionate way allowing young new entrants to be allowed to come into the fishery, with a fair allocated quota. The fishery is managed very well at the moment, the TAC can be shared up seasonally with some extra suction dredge licenses and would benefit greatly young fisherman for their future in the cockle fishing industry
- I believe that any future decisions and visions should be consulted between the estuary's fishermen and the current cockle fishermen with the authorities to create a sustainable fisheries
- Future aim is to include under 10m boats for Area 14 (Jamaica/Margate Sands)

Comments made in the next section but not classed as an "alternative vision"

- I think it should stay the same, as it is now, to many changes could affect livelihoods and destroy the industry.
- I feel the CFFPB areas on the Essex side of the Thames should be fished more often. History shows turning these grounds over helps cockle spat recruitment maybe if this had been maintained it would have stopped the increase of Clam species becoming the dominant force in areas such as the Dengie. That being said maybe the Clam species could now become a very useful productive and sustainable fishery in future years
- Having fished with my father for since leaving school over 24 years ago, I have seen over the past 10 years a decline in stocks and do not believe this is through over fishing but more by under fishing

the beds as they are gradually being taken over by clams and other species . I believe sometimes you can kill grounds with kindness.

- It should remain a sustainable fishery but needs to be accessed by a wider range of fisherman within the local area. The local fishing industry is struggling so allowing them to have access would help encourage new and younger crew into the industry.
- The KEIFCA vision must support the local fishing fleets and encourage them to fish sustainably in the already successful MSC fishery. This fishery has huge historic importance to the local coastal communities and provides opportunity for skilled employment in the area, not just directly in fishing, but also in ancillary services such as processing, canning, marine engineering, and other skilled craftspeople (carpentry, metal work, electrical (not exhaustive list)).

As part of the consultation process stakeholders were invited to write their own version of the vision. Taking onboard the feedback from the Consultation 1 process KEIFCA officers have written a new alternative vision and included it in the options.

The vision proposed in Consultation 1:

1. "KEIFCA will seek to sustainably manage the cockle fisheries and wider ecosystem in KEIFCA district and support a viable cockle industry, recognising its important long-term contribution to coastal communities and providing skilled employment."

NEW version of the vision using feedback from Consultation 1:

2. "KEIFCA will seek to maintain both sustainable cockle fisheries in the KEIFCA district as well as the wider ecosystem it relies on. Supporting a viable local cockle industry, recognising its important long-term contribution to coastal communities, and providing skilled employment."

Versions of the vision developed by stakeholders

3. "KEIFCA will seek to maintain and build on the success of the cockle fisheries and wider ecosystem within the KEIFCA and support the local fishing fleets by encouraging them to sustainably fish and support the world renown Thames cockle fishery by recognizing its historic importance of the local coastal communities and provision of skilled employment whilst benefiting the many other industries it supports with its activities and ensuring that the MSC status achieved after many years of history is fully maintained."

4. "KEIFCA will seek to sustainably manage the cockle fisheries and wider ecosystem in KEIFCA district and keep supporting a viable cockle industry for all

fishers who have been financially committed to the Thames cockle fishery, inside the TECFO and outside in the Permit byelaw area, whilst also creating a hand work fishery for the inshore fleet and newcomers, recognising its important long-term contribution to coastal communities and providing skilled employment."

5. "KEIFCA in conjunction with the local fishing industries will seek to sustainably manage the cockle fisheries to ensure their historic background and success is at the forefront of all decisions made. Sustainable fishing means leaving enough shellfish on the seabed and protecting habitats and threatened species. By safeguarding the oceans, and the people who depend on fishing can maintain their livelihoods."

6. "KEIFCA has to maintain the success of the cockle fisheries and wider ecosystem within the KEIFCA and support the local fishing fleets by encouraging them to sustainably fish, ensuring that the MSC status achieved after many years of history is fully maintained."

Recommendation:

Members are asked to:

1. **DISCUSS** and **VOTE** for the final wording of the vision statement.

2. Developing evaluation criteria

Compared to the vision the evaluation criteria provide a more detailed set of statements that outline the key aspects of running successful sustainable cockle fisheries. The aim is that the criteria can be used as a simple framework that can help evaluate future management options while clearly linking to the strategic vision statement. The evaluation criteria ask a consistent set of straightforward questions of each management option.

It is entirely possible that there might be some criteria (e.g., a simple framework) that might be quite hard for any option to meet or there might be criteria that a large range of different options would meet (setting TAC within stock limits); the important thing is for the Authority to evaluate each option consistently and systematically. There could also be some criteria that are less important or harder to evaluate at the beginning of the process (is the option straightforward to enforce) while there are other criteria that are vital at the start of the process but become less important once decisions about options have been made (simplicity of framework).

Feedback from Consultation 1

The proposed evaluation criteria received less comment than the vision statement. Overall, the feedback was generally positive and reflected that the questions covered most of the key aspects. Of the less positive responses stakeholders reflected that the criteria were too complex, too time consuming to work through or failed to take into enough account of; the importance of maintaining high levels of safety in the fishery, the importance of including fishers from outside the Thames that historically worked the ground, the importance of supporting local boats and businesses especially those that had invested in the fishery.

The evaluation questions were included in the questions laid out after each option in the Consultation 1 document, allowing the questions to be applied to real options rather than being a theoretical framework. Consultation replies showed these questions did help capture detailed views on each option. However, based on feedback from stakeholders, officers will endeavour to structure future consultations, so the evaluation criteria questions are less repetitive.

3. Do you have any comments regarding the evaluation criteria?

TECFO

- The Evaluation criteria is complex however as individuals involved within the industry and as businessmen we fully understand the in depth knowledge that we need to impart with to the authority members and officers. *(10 responses 050602, 050607, 050608, 050702, 050703, 050704, 050706, 050707, 050708, 050908)*
- The criteria seems to cover all necessary aspects.
- Evaluation criteria does tick all the boxes. A 30 year Regulating Order would safeguard all the options in the Evaluation Criteria. This is highly complicated and time consuming to fill these forms, but as a business operating within the fishery we do understand the complexities of this process, and it is critical to make the best decisions based on all this information. *(2 responses 050603, 050604)*
- The evaluation criteria are clear and encompass all the important points. My only issue is the implication that the K&EIFCA is seeking to create something new when in reality all these criteria are met by the current TECFO.
- It is really important to ensure that the vast experience of the current cockle industry over the last 27 years is drawn upon when looking at criteria for developing management in the future years.
- The evaluation criteria are complex. Our obligation as people involved in the sector is to explain in the most understandable way this complexity to the members and officials of the authority. *(3 responses 050803, 050804, 050806)*
- Agree

CFFPB (Permit Fishery)

- The safe and skilled workforce, does not emphasise the dangers of fishing, particular with heavy gear. The TECFO fleet is very safe and the vessels constantly improved, leading to larger vessels for safety. We have to be careful, that we don't create a fishery that isn't safe or viable for small vessels; which have not had heavy gear onboard or any experience. We talk about support the cockle industry and its heritage, but where the product is going has to be looked at. Landing 1000 kg of cockles in kent isn't going to help anyone, as processors wont fire up the factories. You cant land cockles and sell them unprocessed on your local wet fish counter. (2 responses 050605, 050606)
- Very in depth for fisherman time consuming and something we haven't time for.
- I think the framework is ok and fishers should be easy to understand.
- Nothing is mentioned about fishers who are not local but depend on the Thames cockle fishery and have been financially committed. Outside fishers must be included in all of the above as they will also contribute to the local economy.

Vessels which have continuously fished for cockles in the Thames and have been financially committed must be as much of a priority as the TECFO fisherman and all other local fisherman.

Other - catching sector

- Good criteria

Other Sector

- The Evaluation criteria is complex however, as Business men that have invested heavily over the past 50 years in the cockle Industry our in depth knowledge is of the utmost importance in answering all the questions fully, we believe that you have covered as much as possible to try and gain the insight of thousands of years of combined practical knowledge.

Wording of the Evaluation criteria

Creating a well-managed fishery

- (a) Does the option provide a simple framework that is easy for fishers, Authority members and other stakeholders to understand and work within?
- (b) Will the option be easy and cost-efficient to administer, and not create too much paperwork for applicants to fill in?
- (c) Will the option help create clear rules and regulations and be straightforward for KEIFCA officers to enforce and fishers to comply with?

Creating an environmentally responsible fishery

- (d) Does the option help ensure the cockle stock population is fished within clear limits that consider stock assessments and breeding stock?
- (e) Does the option help assess and monitor the impact of the fishery on the seabed, and strive to make the impact as small as possible?

(f) Does the option help consider the impact of the cockle fishery management on the wider ecosystem (including carbon footprint) and support internationally recognised accreditation systems (e.g. Marine Stewardship Council)?

Helping to support a successful and resilient local coastal economy

(g) Does the option provide a framework that will help sustain a viable long-term cockle industry in the KEIFCA district?

(h) Will the option help support local skilled employment?

(i) Will the option help assist long-term investment and growth in the local economy, supporting local shore side infrastructure and supply chains?

(j) Will the option help to 'add value' to the cockles that are caught in the cockle fishery?

Strengthening and supporting our dynamic local coastal community

(k) Does the option provide fair opportunities for individuals and businesses, and help support young or new fishers?

(l) Does the option help encourage businesses to invest in a safe and skilled workforce?

(m) Does the option help support the heritage and culture of the cockle fishery, including supporting local tourism associated with the Thames cockle fishery?

Recommendation:

Members are asked to:

2. **APPROVE** the wording of the evaluation criteria.