

By: KEIFCA Chief Fishery Officer

To: Kent & Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority
– 19 October 2022

Subject: **Update on Consultation for 2023 cockle permit fishery**

Classification Unrestricted

Summary:

This paper will provide Members with a summary on the feedback from the consultation questionnaire for the 2023 cockle permit fishery and a series of recommendations as to how the fishery could be run in 2023 to better develop a small-scale fishery that provides a reliable fishing opportunity.

Recommendations:

RECOMMEND opening the permit fishery for the category 2 permit four weeks before opening the fishery for the category 1 permit holders.

RECOMMEND keeping two categories of permit (category 1 and category 2 permits) in 2023 rather than issuing just the category 2 permits.

RECOMMEND that the outcomes of the permit fishery consultation concerning tonnages per category should be discussed as part of the general 2023 cockle permit management discussion that takes place after the April/ May stock surveys.

RECOMMEND deferring the decision as to whether TECFO-licensed vessels should fish outside of the TECFO and in the 2023 cockle permit fishery, until May 2023 when we know what stock is available in the permit fishery.

Background

The feedback from Consultation 1 supported the development of a small-scale fishery. This built upon comments in the Listening Phase that the current permit fishery does not work, because it is fished by a fleet which is too big for the available grounds, each taking too large a quantity of cockles per fishing trip.

Rather than run a small-scale fisheries trial in the areas outside a new Regulating Order, the Authority agreed to progress the development of a small-scale fishery using the current flexible permit byelaw.

The aim of the permit fishery is to create a long-term opportunity for the inshore sector that seeks to provide a reliable and regular income and be an addition to the fisheries they currently work in. However, the permit fishery needs to establish workable business models and new fishing methods as a first step before this vision can be realised.

2023 KEIFCA Cockle Permit Fishery Questionnaire

The questionnaire was based on feedback from the Listening Phase and Consultation 1, that review led to the Authority exploring different ways of managing the permit cockle fishery, outside the area of the Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery Order 1994. Initially this is being considered using the existing permit byelaw but changing the focus to enable a greater opportunity for a small-scale fishery in 2023. The questionnaire was purposely stripped back and made as simple as possible to try and enable engagement with an as-wide-as-possible cross-section of the fishing industry. The questionnaire was primarily focusing on the 2023 cockle permit fishery. However, it also linked to the overall cockle fishery review and fishers were strongly advised to look at the review on our website and consider the overarching process prior to completing this questionnaire.

Whilst the final management decisions for this fishery will be made in May 2023 after the stock survey, the feedback from this consultation will allow KEIFCA to set out the broad outline of how the fishery will be run, which in turn might help fishers decide whether to apply for a permit by the 31 March 2023.

Questions and options outlined in the consultation

1) Categories of permit

- Category 1 and Category 2 permits issued
Permits would be issued to all applicants either as Category 1 or Category 2. Category 1 permits would be limited to no more than 6.8m³ or 6 bags of cockles per trip, category 2 permits would be limited to no more than 1.7m³ or 1.5 bags of cockles per trip, and in addition would be permitted to undertake twice the number of trips as a category permit. This would result in each category 2 permit landing a maximum of half the amount landed by a category 1 permit.
- Just Category 2 issued
Only applications for category 2 permits would be accepted, any category 1 permit applications would be rejected, and the applicant invited to apply for a category 2 permit. All vessels would be limited to the same quantity per trip, either 1.7m³

(1.5 bags) or 3.4m³ (3 bags) of cockles per trip and the TAC would be split equally to provide the same number of trips for each permit holder.

2) When to fish?

Targeting a time of year for when the fishery is at, or close to, peak yields is important to achieve the best economic return and therefore viability for the fishery. The permit fishery has, in recent years, been undertaken in mid-October. It is suggested that bringing this forward to late summer between early September and mid-October would improve the viability of the fishery for vessels.

3) Different start times

If two categories of permit are issued, then Category 1 vessels and Category 2 vessels would be given different specified fishing times. This could take one of a number of forms, from a delayed start time for category 1 vessels, to two distinct and separate fishing periods for each category, or a long stretched out fishery for category 2 vessels and a short, intense fishery for category 1 vessels.

4) Reducing permit fishery fleet size

Reducing the size of the fleet working on the permit fishery would first enable smaller areas of cockle bed to be opened as the fleet would be taking less cockles per trip. Secondly, it would enable more trips of the fleet to be carried out on larger beds, helping to make the fishery more economically viable. Restricting the ability of the fleet which fishes the Regulating Order to access the permit fishery would reduce the size of the fleet considerably. The average fleet size over the past 11 years has been 34 vessels, this could be reduced to 20 vessels by removing the current TECFO fleet.

5) Clam fishery

Clams have been found in increasing quantities in a number of cockle harvesting areas in recent years. They are found primarily in Area 7 off the Essex coast, however smaller quantities are being found on the north Kent coast, especially around the Isle of Grain. Whilst they are not currently commercially harvested within the District, there is the potential for a fishery if MPA and food health requirements can be met. However, it is the industry's responsibility to ensure that the other requirements for landing shellfish such as only taking stock from waters which are classified for those species are complied with via the relevant regulators. If this is done, then the next step would be for the industry to report

the quantities, using their existing catch return forms, that they are removing of species other than cockles. This will help KEIFCA develop appropriate management for future years.

Cockle permit feedback

Overall the consultation proved successful and 56 questionnaires were completed, with 23 responses received from local fishermen not currently holding a permit, highlighting a lot of interest from under 10m fleet that have not been cockling before.

The summary report (Appendix 1) highlights the different needs and wants of the different sectors from the permit fishery, with the current TECFO licence holders and the current permit holders strongly indicating that they would apply for a category 1 licence whereas the vast majority of the catching sector would apply for a category 2 permit with half the amount and twice the number of trips as it would better fit their generally smaller fishing boats.

There was a very mixed response to the start date of the fishery, with the overall majority of questionnaire replies and the majority of the Catching Sector agreeing with the start date in early September. A range of other proposed start times were suggested with some fishermen requesting an all-year-round fishery, others autumn/winter fishery for clams and the Christmas market. Based on practical operational considerations and level of interest from the catching sector officers would recommend opening the permit fishery for the category 2 permit 4 weeks before opening the fishery for the category 1 permit holders. This would allow officers the time they need to adequately assess damage rates and impact of the gear on the ground at a time of year when boardings are at their easiest and safest, which is likely to be a key requirement of getting the permit fishery approved by Natural England.

On the question of keeping all vessels restricted to the same tonnage on a cockle trip, there was support for this idea from the catching sector and the current permit holders but opposition from the current TECFO licence holders. Officers would still recommend keeping 2 categories of permit in 2023 rather than issuing just category 2 permit with a 3 tonnes allocation as it would be sensible to see how fishermen new to cockling fair with using new gear before impacting more established suction dredgers (current TECFO licence holders and current permit holders) who asked for 6 tonnes a trip.

Officers would recommend that the outcomes of the permit fishery consultation concerning tonnages per category would better be discussed in the light of stock surveys in April/ May when we can be more confident in the stock allocations per permit and develop more detailed management based on this feedback.

In response to the question as to whether TECFO-licenced vessels should fish outside of the TECFO in 2023, a significant majority of the current permit holders

and the catching sector replies that they felt that TECFO-licenced vessels should not fish in the permit fishery in 2023, while the replies from the current TECFO licence holders were split 50:50. Part of the reason for this is most likely due to the Thames Estuary Fisherman's Association suggesting that TECFO licence holders would not fish in the permit area if the Authority agreed to the NEW BERMUDA 28 option. Officers recommend reviewing this option in May when we know what stock is available.

Summary

Across all sectors, fishers indicated that they would be interested in catching clams as a bycatch. As outlined in the previous section of this report the clam stocks alone are not found in commercial quantities that would warrant a specific permit fishery however, they could form a lucrative bycatch with vessels landing both species provided that they were over minimum sizes and sorted effectively.

The consultation questionnaire highlights the differences and tensions between different fishing operations and businesses; however, the consultation does give a direction of travel for the Authority and the engagement from the catching sector has been significant and very encouraging. There will be lot of work to do to turn ideas into a reality expressed by the under 10m inshore fleet/ catching sector. As a first step officers will write to all the fishers in January who replied to the consultation and invite them to apply for a 2023 permit.

Recommendations

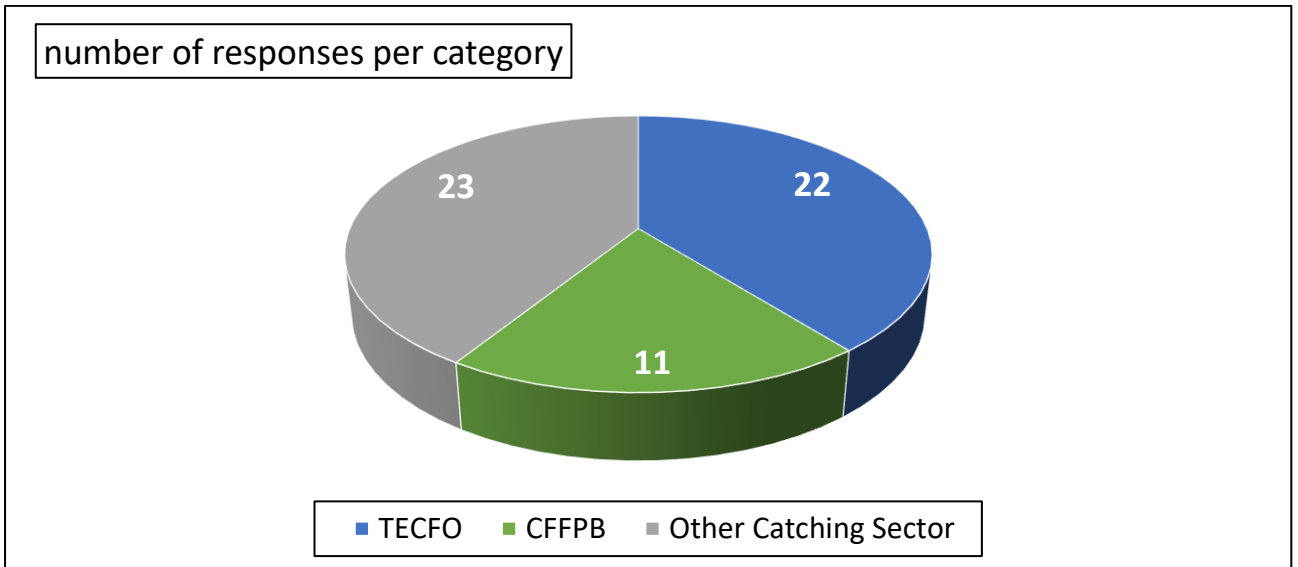
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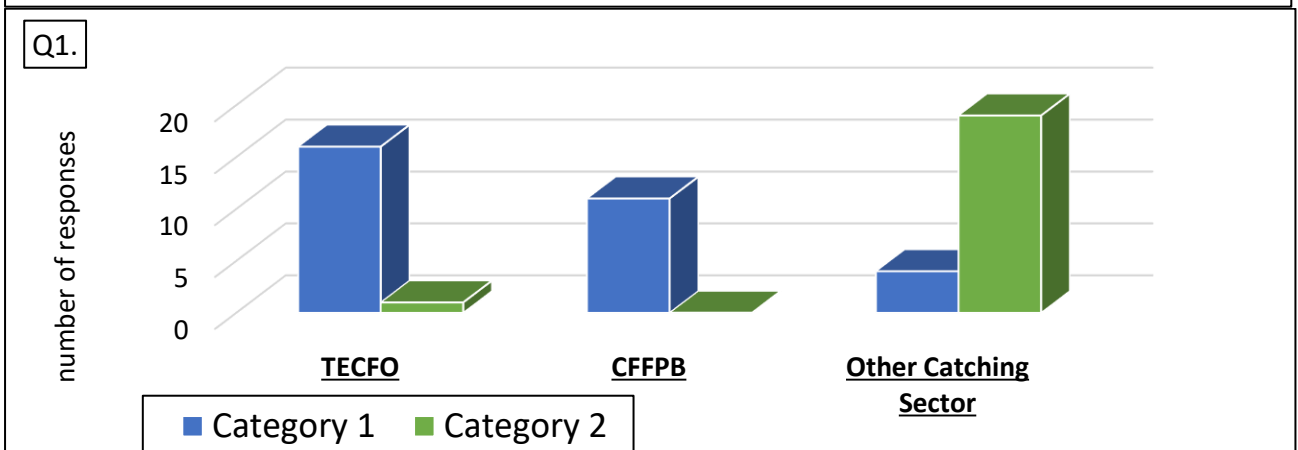
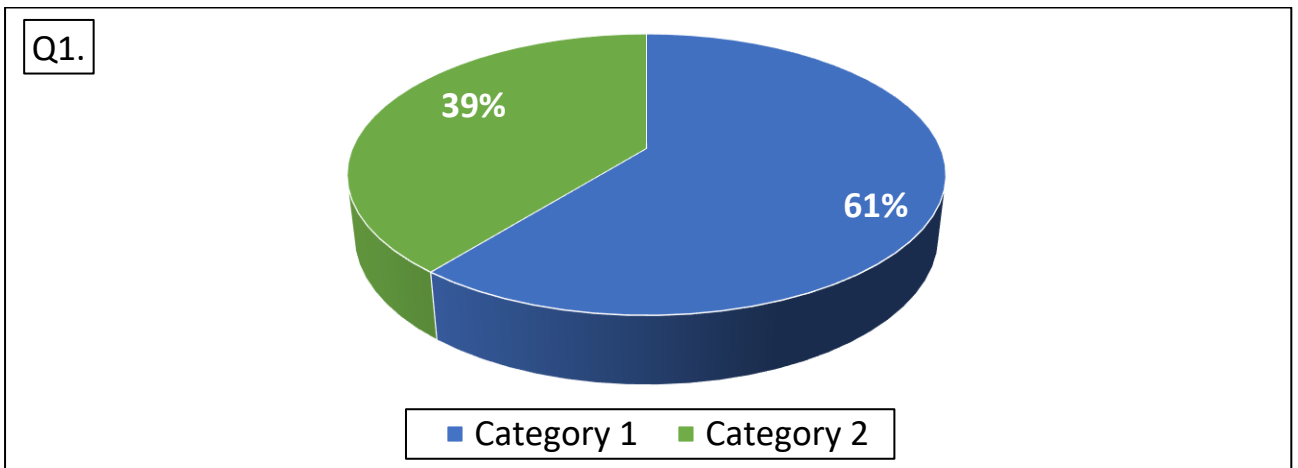
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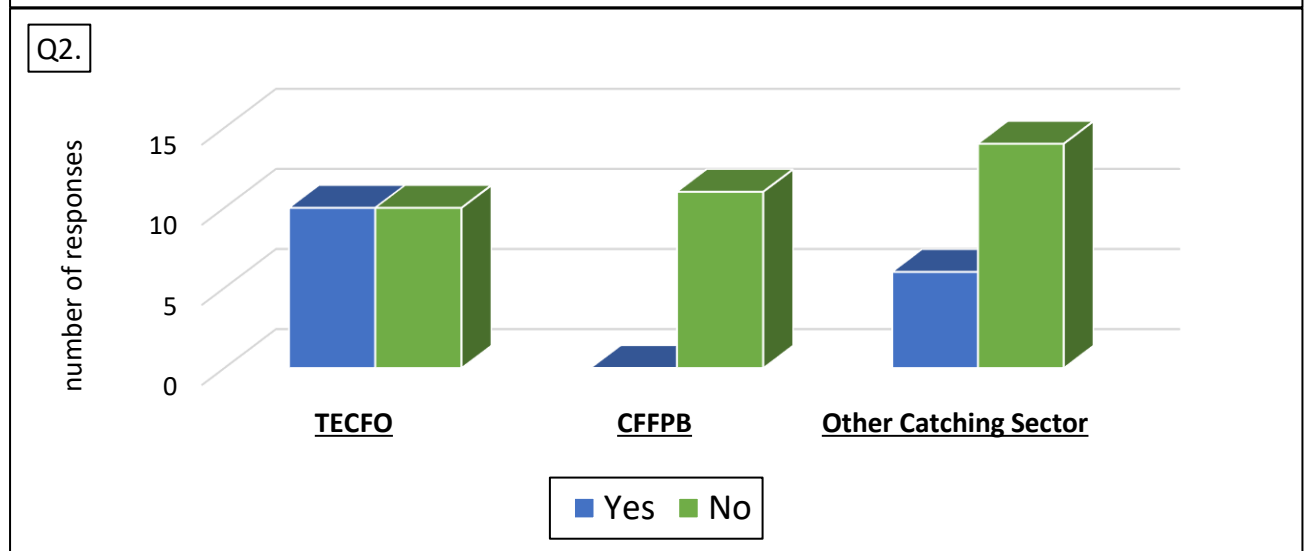
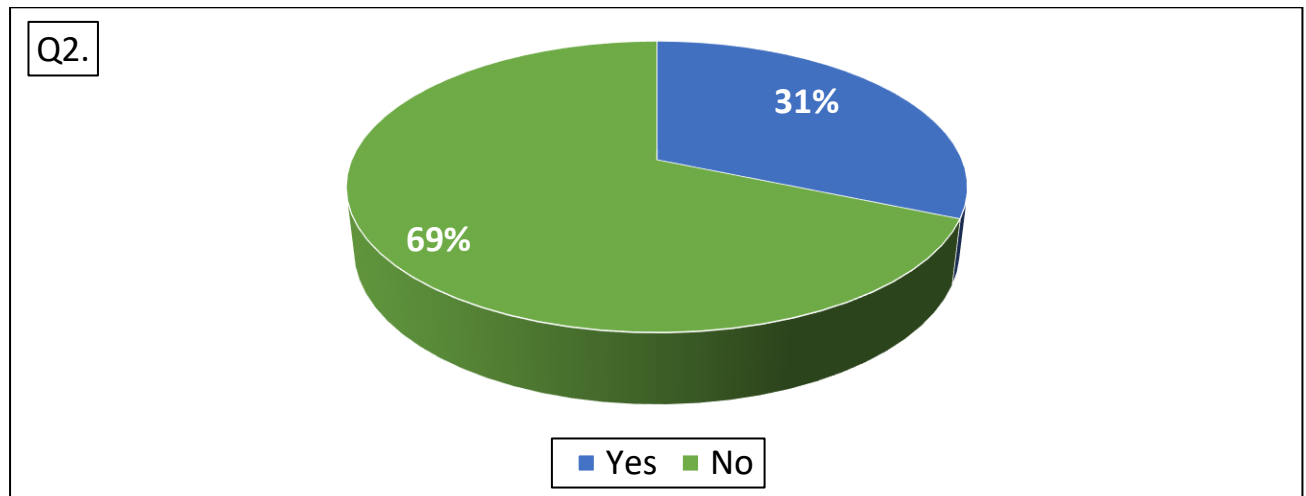
Appendix 1: Consultation 2 - Summary of small scale fishery questionnaire responses



Q1. Do you intend to apply for a permit to fish for cockles outside of the TECFO in 2023? If so, which category of permit are you likely to apply for?

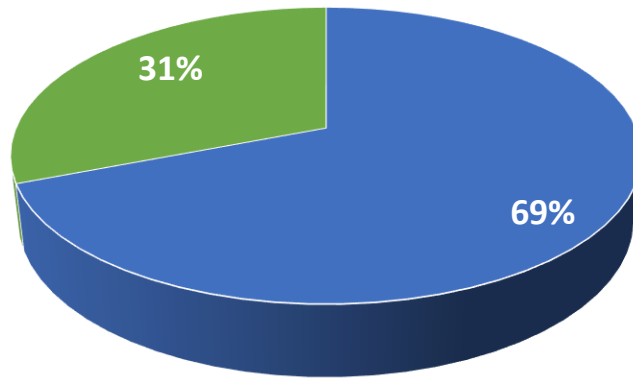


Q2. Do you think TECFO-licensed vessels should fish for cockles outside of the TECFO in 2023?



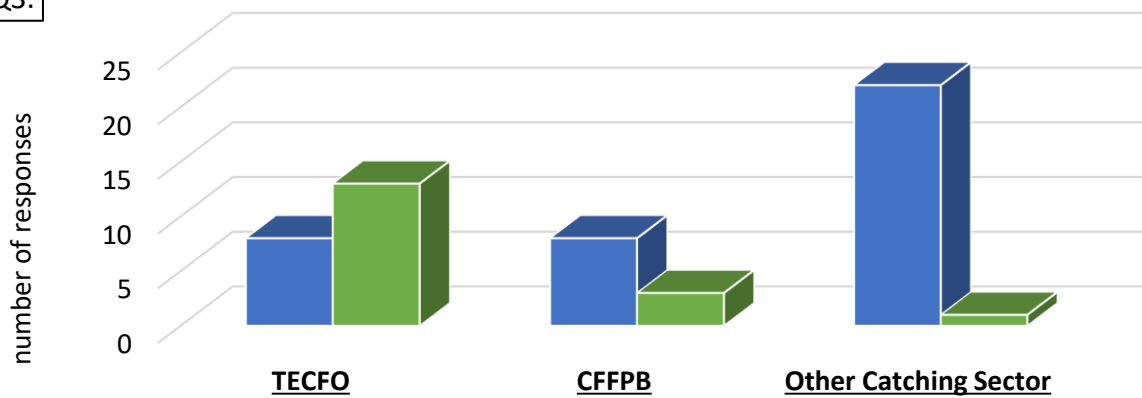
Q3. Yields are generally better in the late summer period. We will aim to try and open the fishery when yields are at their best. As a result, the suggested start date for the fishery is in early September. Do you agree with this?

Q3.



■ Yes ■ No

Q3.



number of responses

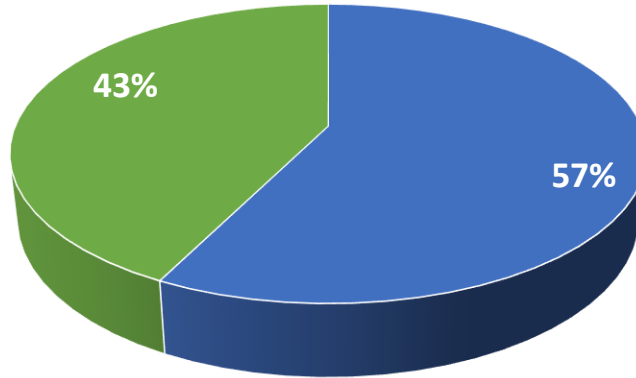
■ Yes ■ No

If 'No' please say why and provide your alternative suggested time for opening the fishery.

TECFO	To support a small scale fishery and entice new people in to the fishery limiting its opening limits its viability in market access, ie; the local markets are open 52 weeks of the year, the main fishery supports the international market as well as the local market for a limited period of time (x5)
	all down to water temp
	Move to August as there are better yields and weather is better (x4)
	risk of spreading viruses in shellfish
	July-August is best
CFFPB	Is this just for the non TECFO regisgtered boats? If this is for the outside TECFO regulated area then yes a later start would be better, if it is for both fisheries then a start date like normal of late june is better as with a larger quantity of cockles to fish they start growing faster once they have begun being fished
	The yields are better in August
	This fishery had always opened alongside the TECFO fishery until the present BYELAW was made. To me and others all it achieved was the assisting of the 14 TECFO vessels fishing the PERMIT fishery upon the TECFO closure each year. It should never have changed from the way it had opened pre PERMIT BYELAW (x5)
	Maybe mid august as September can be a bad month weather wise
	Yields are best from July - August. Please note this fishery was always open in June and was a viable fishery; it is not a viable fishery for only a few days per year
Other Catching Sector	a winter or late autumn fishery would be good as well
	manilla clams best in winter
	need to have flexibility e.g. have 2-3 dyas/trips in the month
	yeald yes but for small boats no due to weather and time

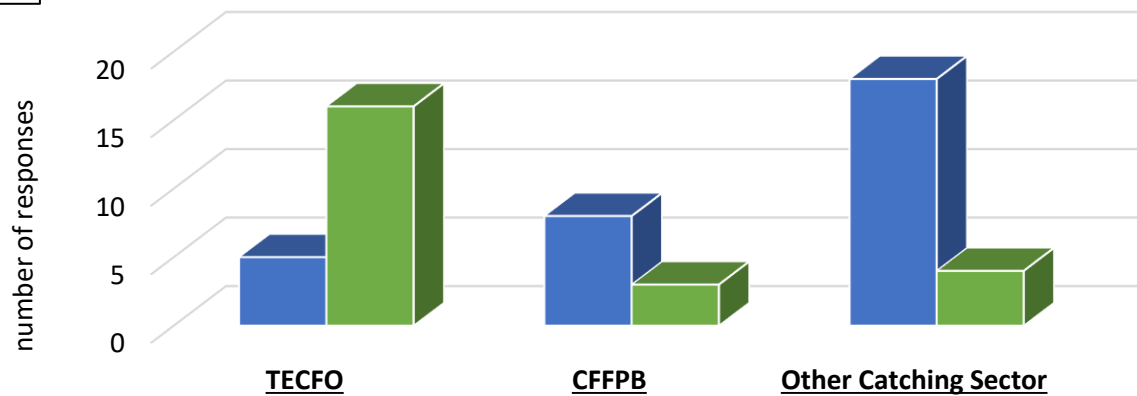
Q4. Given the aim is for a 'small-scale' fishery, should all vessels be restricted to the same tonnage of cockles per trip?

Q4.



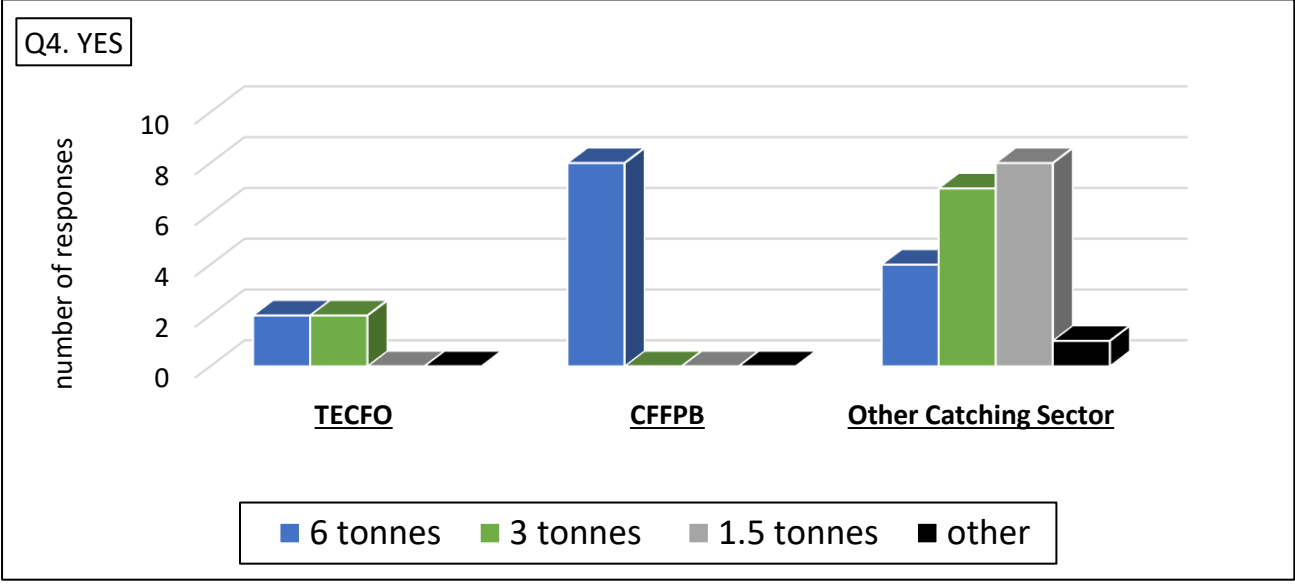
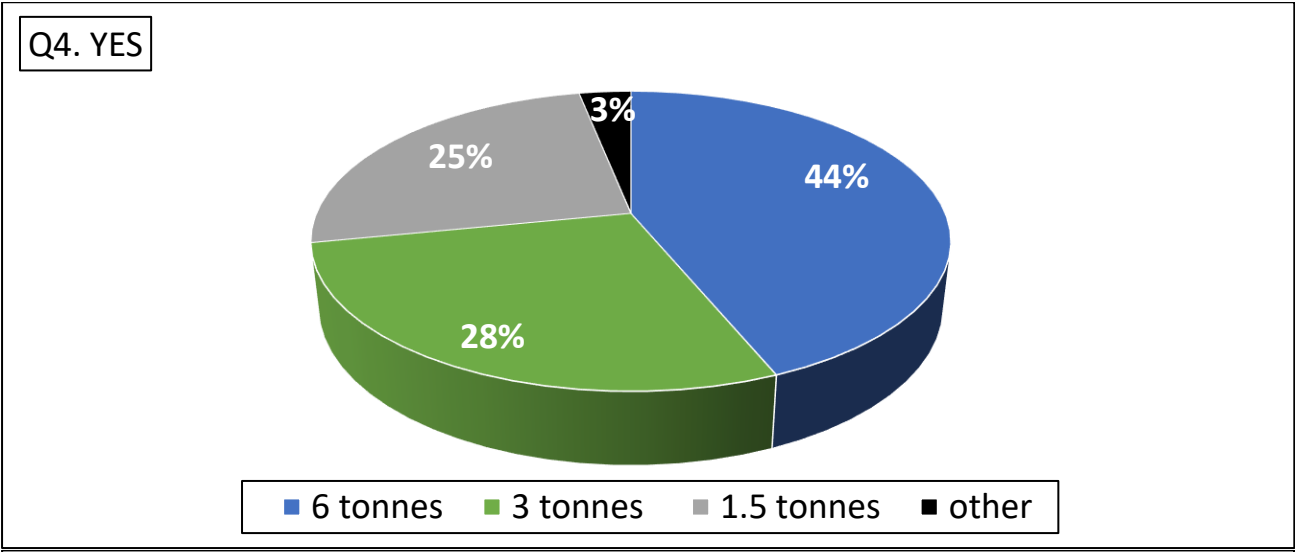
■ Yes ■ No

Q4.



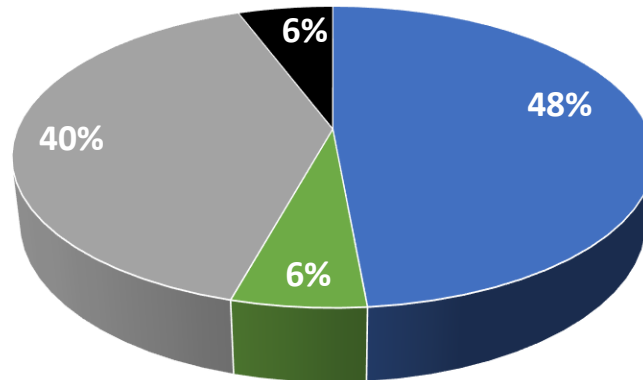
■ Yes ■ No

If 'yes', what amount should all vessels be limited to?



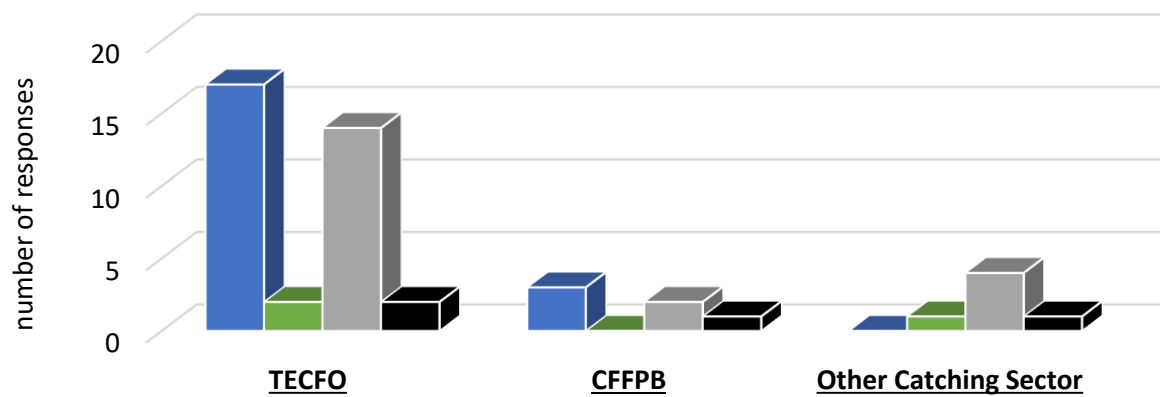
If 'no', what should the maximum tonnage be for each category of permit?

Q4. NO



■ Cat 1: 6 tonnes ■ Cat 1: 3 tonnes ■ Cat 2: 3 tonnes ■ Cat 2: 1.5 tonnes

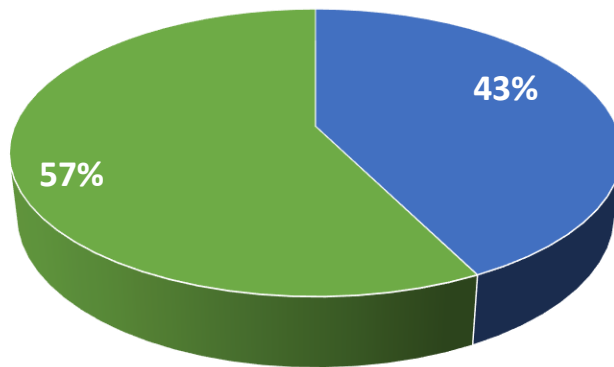
Q4. NO



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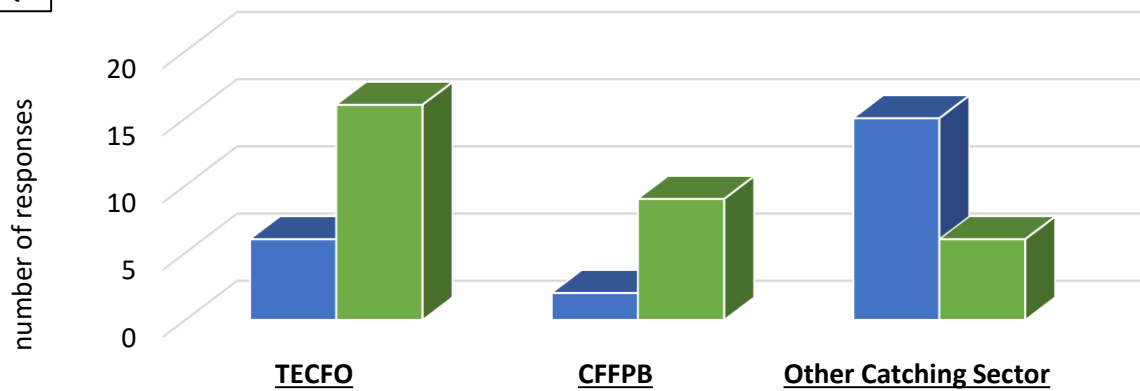
Q5. Should Category 1 and Category 2 vessels be given different times/periods to fish?

Q5.



■ Yes ■ No

Q5.



■ Yes ■ No

If 'yes' please give the reason for your answer

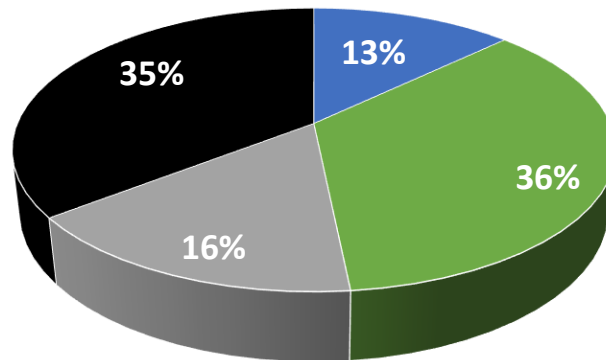
TECFO	it would be difficult to access each other gear position and may cause accidents as each dredge is up to 30 ft behind the boat.
	safety (x3)
	Due to safety concerns, with larger vessels working alongside smaller vessels.
CFFPB	It keeps the different fishing methods separate. This is important because then you can assess the breakage rate on each method.
	Maybe an earlier start time
Other Catching Sector	size of boats & different methods of fishing wouldn't work together, would be chaos (x2)
	larger vessels compromise my potential to catch to fish for best market prices
	IFCA officers would be too busy to manage both
	a fishing vessel cannot fish two different areas at one time. Therefore it gives different sizes of vessels a chance in making a living and not pushed out (x2)
	due to pressure on ground and less space for boats if both categories are fishing at the same time
	this gives more chance of sustainable fishing
	smaller vessels need to be able to fish undisturbed cockle beds

If 'no' please give the reason for your answer

TECFO	The area of the permit fishery should be sub divided so as all areas are fished with limited numbers of permits issued (X3)
	All fish same. Makes easier for KEIFCA to manage fishery (x4)
	Due to safety concerns, with larger vessels working alongside smaller vessels.
	The area of the permit fishery should be sub divided so as all areas are fished with limited numbers of permits issued This would also negate the need for different starting times (x2)
	There is a limited amount of stock. A staggered start would give some an unfair advantage
CFFPB	Category 2 would fish the best spots before category 1
	Apart from weather I see no reason, for my 25 years of cockle fishing I have always worked to tight time frames, I have not always had the luxury of a 14m vessel either to fish any weather conditions.
	It would be impossible to manage, and leave the fishery open to fraud
	every vessel should fish the same time if they are on the same tonnage per trip. If daily TAC is lower fish same week but with more time but both categories should fish in same week.
Other Catching Sector	So vessels can be monitored together on landing times
	Fairness commercial opportunity

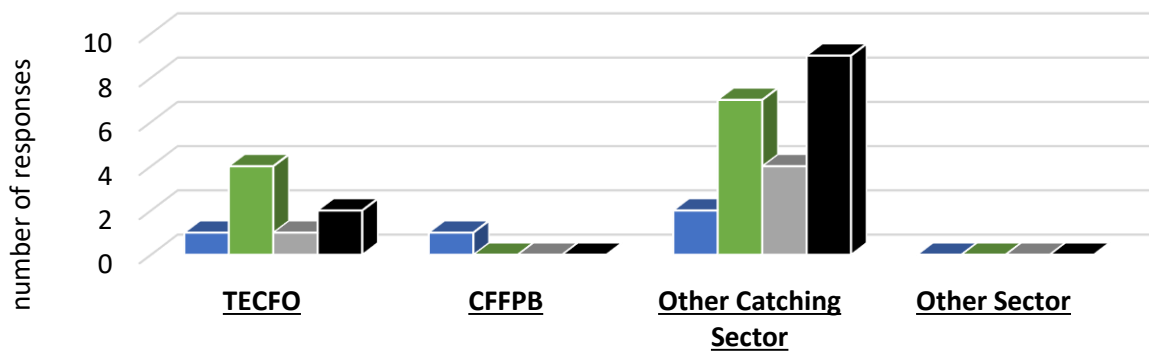
Q6. If you answered 'Yes' to Q4, do you think that Category 2 vessels should be allowed to:

Q6.



- a) start the day before category 1 vessels
- b) start the week before the category 1 vessels
- c) have a longer period to fish in than the category 1 vessels (ie start before and finish after)
- d) fish at a completely different time to the category 1 vessels

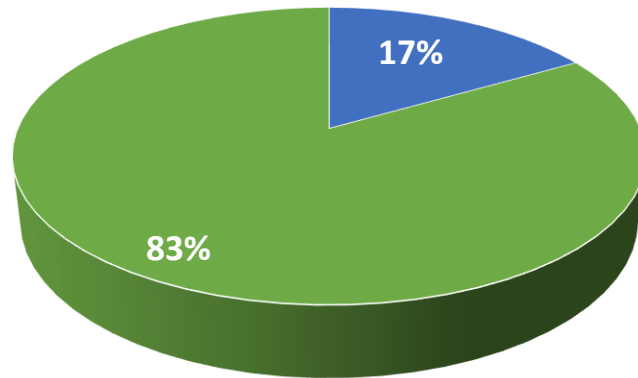
Q6.



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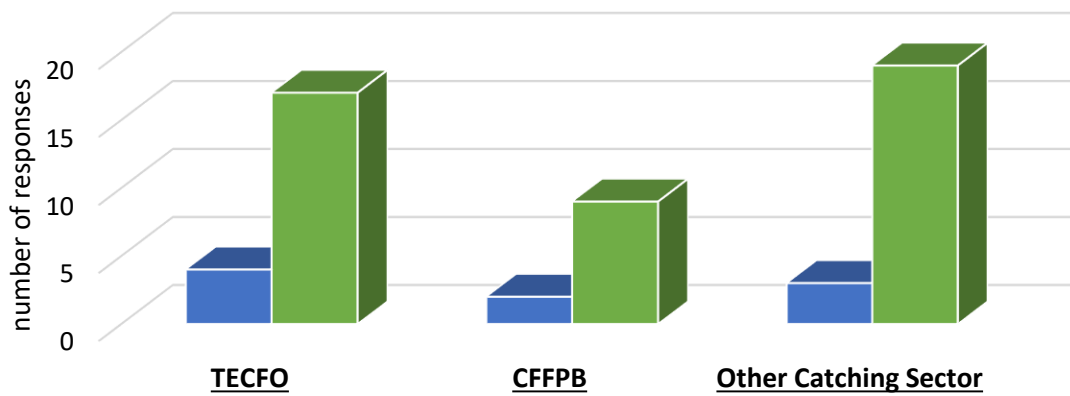
Q7. Would you be interested in catching clams as bycatch on cockle fishery trips or do you just want to catch cockles?

Q7.



■ Cockles only ■ Cockles & clams

Q7.



■ Cockles only ■ Cockles & clams