

# MCZ Native Oyster Project



Native oyster populations were once extensive and supported a huge industry.

In 1850s & 1860's phenomenal spat falls lead to a huge increase in landings.

Dr. James Murie in his report to the KESFC in 1903 reports:-

*In 1870 a rather nice bed was found (near the Queens channel – off the Kent coast) but the news no sooner spread than 75 smacks from all quarters flocked thither and presto left the ground bare”.*

Demand increased with improved transport, but supply could not meet demand, and so oysters were bought in from USA, Portugal and France to meet demand.

MAFF REPORT - *Of the 22.9 million oysters landed in 1914, 89% were from the east coast, mainly from Essex and Kent ports. (= 2,250 tonnes)*

# Current Day Oyster Industry within the MCZ



9 full time vessels oyster dredging + up to 20 additional vessels on occasions





Due to overfishing, very cold winters in 1945 and 1963 and disease - stocks are now at an all time low.



- Most oyster fishing activity is now on private grounds where the largest stocks of native oysters are maintained.
- Catches of native oysters on public grounds have declined further.
- Fishery for non- native wild *C. gigas* oysters has increased



# Essex Native Oyster Restoration Initiative



Kent and Essex IFCA has responsibilities to further the aims of the MCZ designation.

Stakeholder workshops were held at West Mersea in 2013 and 2014 to consider the need for native oyster restoration and what additional actions could be taken to assist recovery.

Essex – Native Oyster Restoration Initiative ( Essex – NORI).

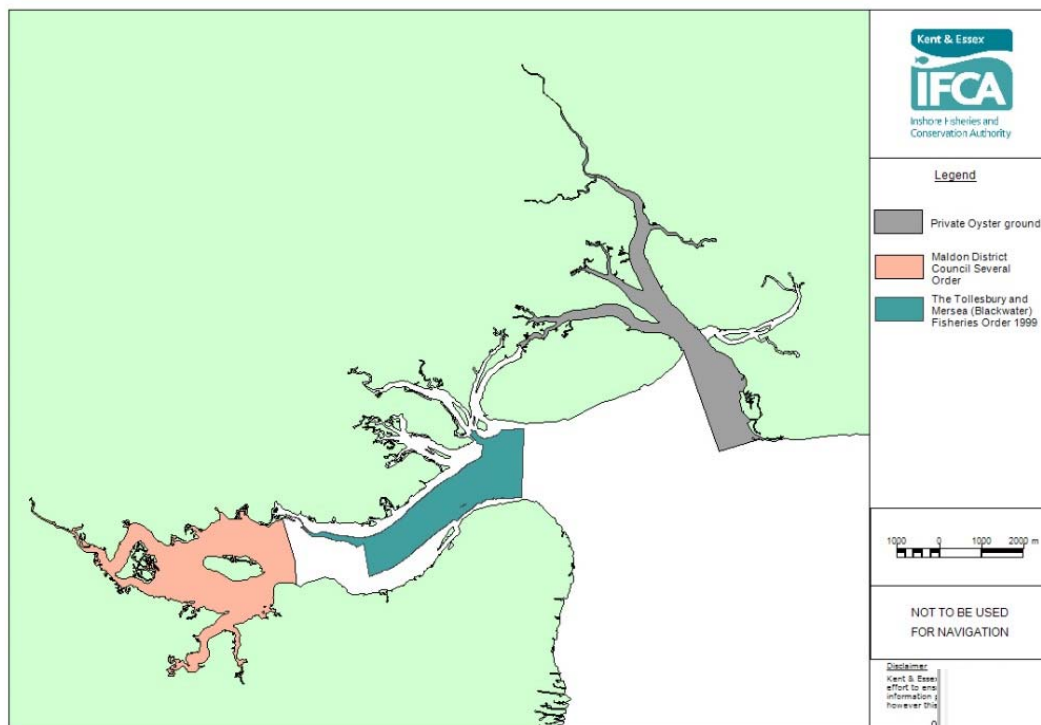
A smaller working group now meets every 3 months to consider further work and make recommendations to KEIFCA .

The working group now includes:

Blackwater Oysterman's Association  
Kent and Essex IFCA  
Crouch and Roach Oyster Fishermen  
Zoological Society London

Essex Wildlife Trust  
Natural England  
Cambridge University  
Blue Marine Foundation

# Activity Location – Private Fisheries

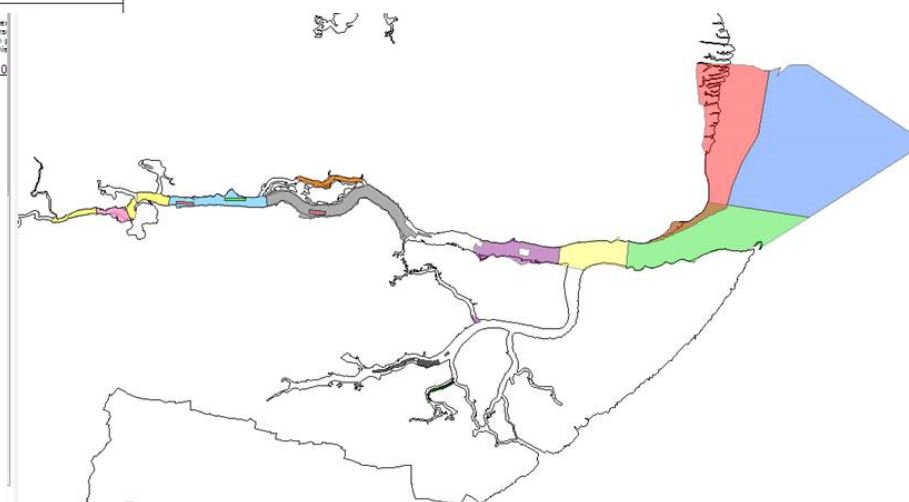


Private Fisheries  
The Colne and Maldon Fisheries  
are created under ancient charters

Tollesbury and Mersea Several  
Order was created under the 1967  
Shellfish act in 1999 and expires in  
2019

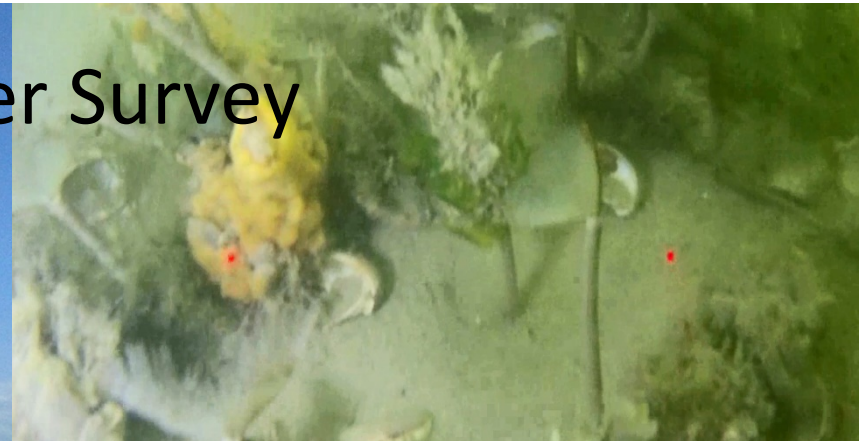
Also small private beds - Mersea

Much of the Crouch is owned by CHA  
Also some private beds  
River Roach Several Order held by  
KEIFCA until 2023



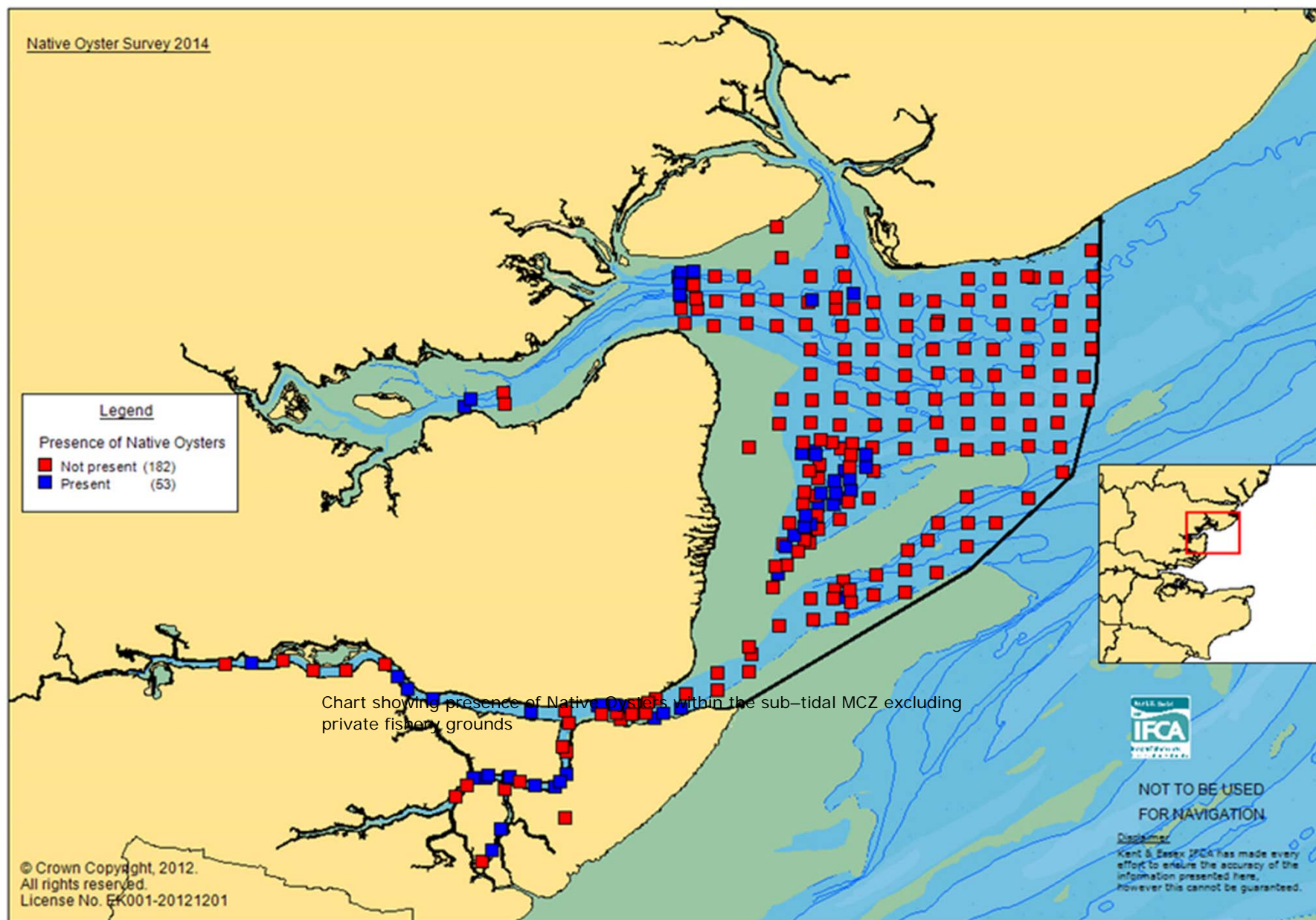


# August 2014 KEIFCA Oyster Survey





# Oyster Survey of Public Grounds - Live Native Oysters





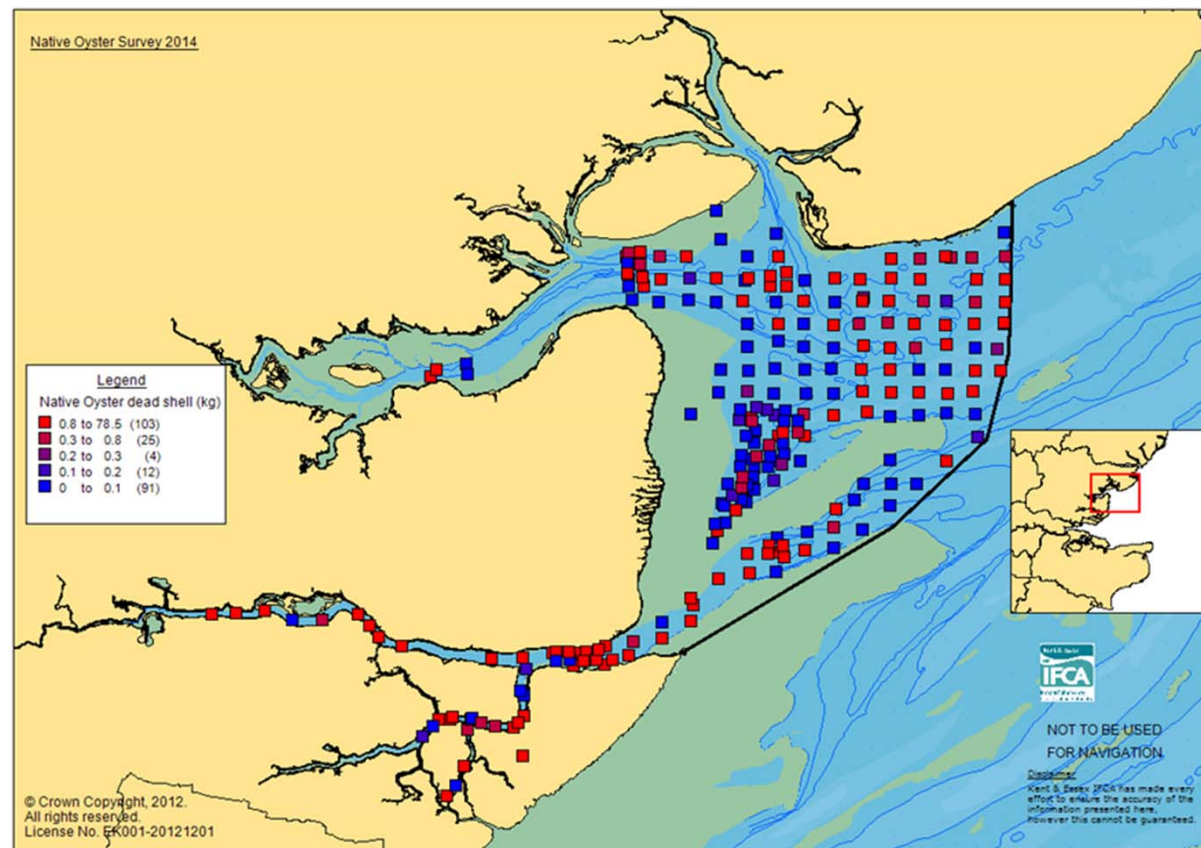
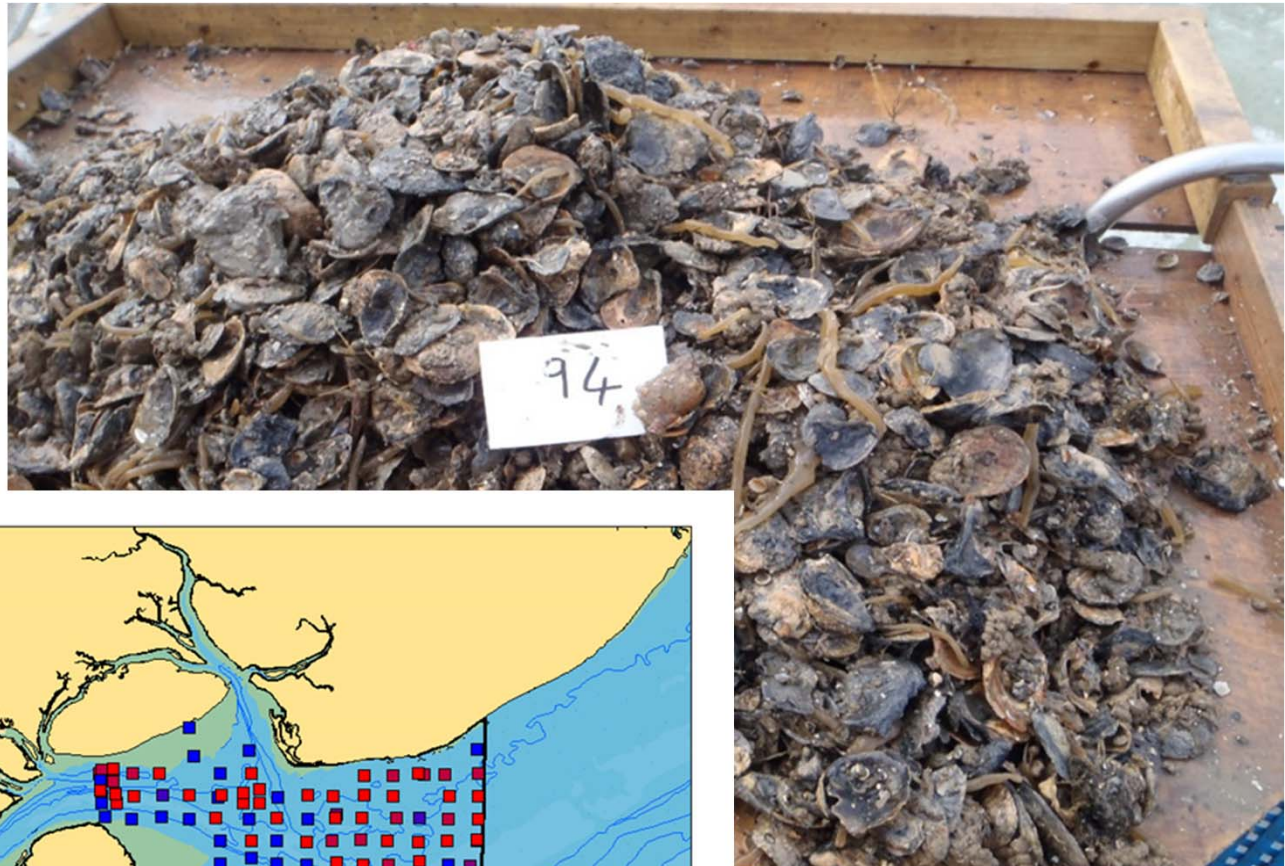
Live Native oysters

Native oyster  
spat on slipper  
limpet shell





## Empty Native Oyster shells

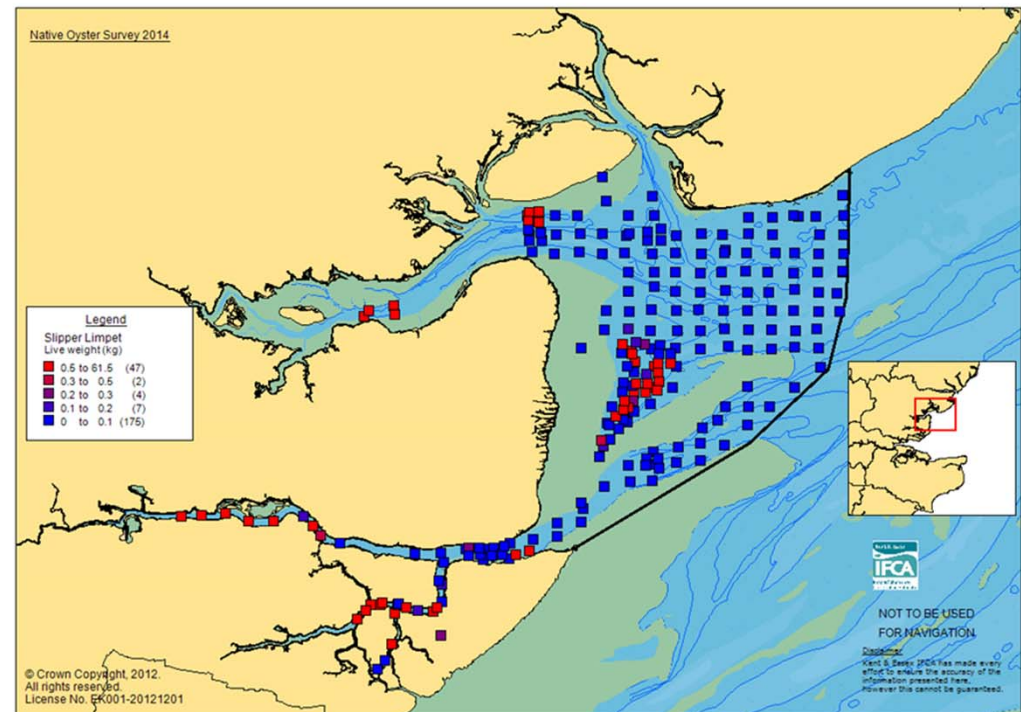




## Slipper Limpets (*Crepidula Fornicata*)



Chart showing presence  
on public grounds





# Current byelaw restrictions



- Current byelaws restrict dredge size to aggregate width of 4 metres within whole district
- Native Oyster Minimum landing size = 70mm (whole district)
- All public grounds within the MCZ are now closed to harvesting native oysters



# Requirements for restoration



Recovery will difficult to achieve and will take at least 5 years and in reality could take at least 25 years.

Following spawning, the oyster larvae need a clean surface (preferably empty shells known as cultch) on which to settle and grow but within our muddy estuaries this is difficult to achieve.

Concluded that positive human intervention is required

Historically oyster beds were maintained by: -

- Maintaining an adult spawning population
- Cleaning silt from the cultch by harrowing
- laying new cultch

Tollesbury and Mersea private fishery -these traditional methods have achieved a significant stock recovery.

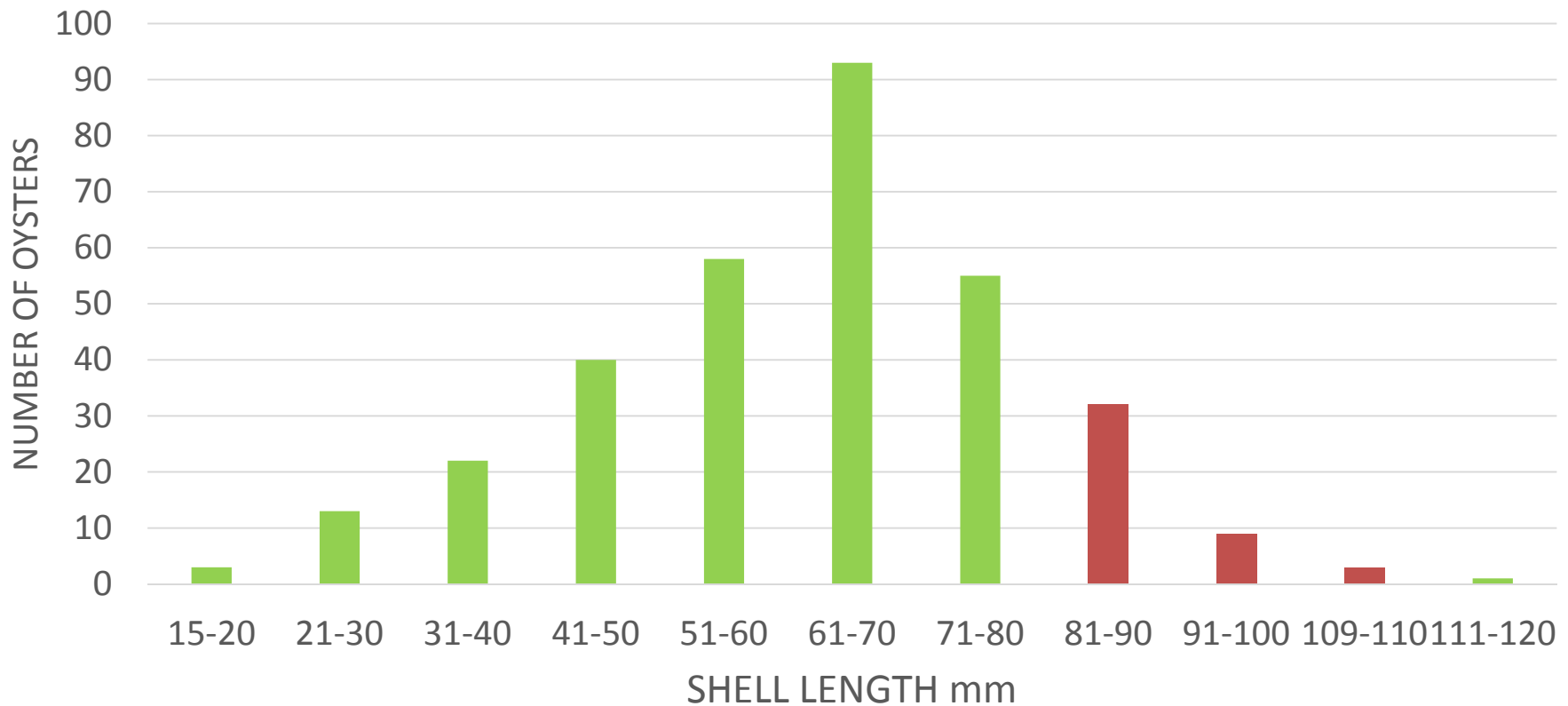


# Restoration work



Surveys have shown low population numbers and a shortage of small oysters  
Best beds at below one oyster /m<sup>2</sup> and many at less than one oyster /20 m<sup>2</sup>

AUGUST 2014 MCZ OYSTER SURVEY



## Restoration work



Close working with the local oyster industry continues.

KEIFCA have prohibited the harvesting of native oysters from the public grounds.

Surveys of stocks are being undertaken annually.

Harrowing on a voluntary basis.

KEIFCA is funding trials on cleaning grounds by chain harrowing this year – control sites, side scan sonar, grab sampling & camera,

A grant application is being made by Essex –NORI to trial laying of cockle shells as cultch to gather evidence of the advantages of this method.



# Future management – next stages



MCZ Conservation advice is to be provided by Natural England.

- Oyster stock objectives - What is recover?
- Time scale
- Objectives to include the revival of a sustainable commercial fishery

PhD project due to commence this autumn – Essex University

Assess trial projects and move forward

Assess impacts on EMS features

Seek outside funding for further work