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OUR REF: SMA/IVA/D.1.2

YOUR REF:

4th November 2011

Dear Permit Holder

Re: THE RIBBLE ESTUARY AND WIRRAL COCKLE BEDS CLOSURE

With great regret, I must announce that the Ribble and Wirral cockle beds will be closed from 00.01 hours on Monday 7 November. Please see enclosed emergency byelaw made by NWIFCA members on 4 November 2011 and closure notices.

This closure is forced on the NWIFCA by over 20 calls to the air and sea emergency services since 1 September. It is a response to advice from Fylde Council, Lancashire Constabulary, Coastguard and many other regulatory bodies. You may have noted the Fisheries Minister's support for closure on Thursday evening (3 November) news. The problem is that many small craft attempting to access the cockle beds have got into difficulty because they have been unsuitable, ill-equipped and have operated in adverse weather conditions. A closure of the Ribble cockle fisheries is the only way to regulate this unsafe activity in the short term.

Wirral cockle stocks have reduced to a level where they are at the minimum level permitted by the NWIFCA. In order to protect stock and manage the fishery sustainably for future years, fishing on the Wirral beds is prohibited from 00.01 hours on Monday, 7th November 2011 and will be subject to review.

The NWIFCA aims to open the Ribble fishery as soon as possible when improved controls can be implemented. I will work with Defra and the MMO and consult with permit holders on the best way to improve controls so that the fishery can be reopened.

From 00.01 hours on Monday 7 November it will be a criminal offence to fish or attempt to fish for cockles from the beds in the Ribble estuary or on the Wirral coast. Fishing for cockles could lead to prosecution and fine of up to £50,000.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. STEPHEN ATKINS
Chief Executive