

**NWIFCA Technical, Science and Byelaw
Sub-Committee
1 November 2013: 10:00am**

**REPORT
NUMBER
13**

SUMMARY REPORT ON OTHER CURRENT ISSUES

Razor clam update

Abigail Leadbeater

Summary: Since the last planning meeting with Dave Palmer of CEFAS in August there has been little movement with the project. Gear development and obtaining the correct permissions in regard to health and safety has taken longer than expected. With the Skipper of the vessel looking to fish for scallops in November and December it is unlikely that any practical work will occur before the New Year. Before work begins a NWIFCA Byelaw derogation is required. This will be issued when requested and a completed HRA signed off.

Foulney Mussel Management

Mandy Knott

Members will recall that a full paper was submitted to the TSB meeting in December 2012 discussing the complexities of managing the hand-gathered mussel fishery at Foulney Twist, north Morecambe Bay. The decision was taken not to authorise the harvesting of undersize mussel which had been requested by some Byelaw 3 permit holders but to enforce the minimum landing size of >45mm. The intention had been for the Science team to investigate other proposals for managing a mussel bed such as Foulney, which contains areas of very mixed sizes of mussel, over the summer months in time for the autumn / winter fishery.

The intention had been to investigate the possibilities of alternative management measures for this fishery during the summer of 2013, eg. zoning. However resources and increased workload due to the EMS Fisheries Review meant that this work did not get done resulting in a similar situation to 2012 when fishers want to fish the skear, but enforcing the MLS is extremely problematic.

A survey was carried out on 8th October and results are presented below.

Mussel Survey:

Two teams covered the main fishable skear on a 1.2m tide (ie the bottom area that held the highest densities of size mussel in spring did not uncover) recording the two main mussel categories in a 0.5m² quadrat as percentage cover (ie. the two categories = 100%). The survey targets the fishery specifically to gain data on what is fishable now and what might come through to size soon, rather than being a biological percentage cover survey. 68 stations were surveyed and percentage cover maps produced.

The results show that the skear holds mussels of very mixed sizes. There are areas of size mussel and large tracts of mussel coming through, along with an area higher on the skear that is slower growing.

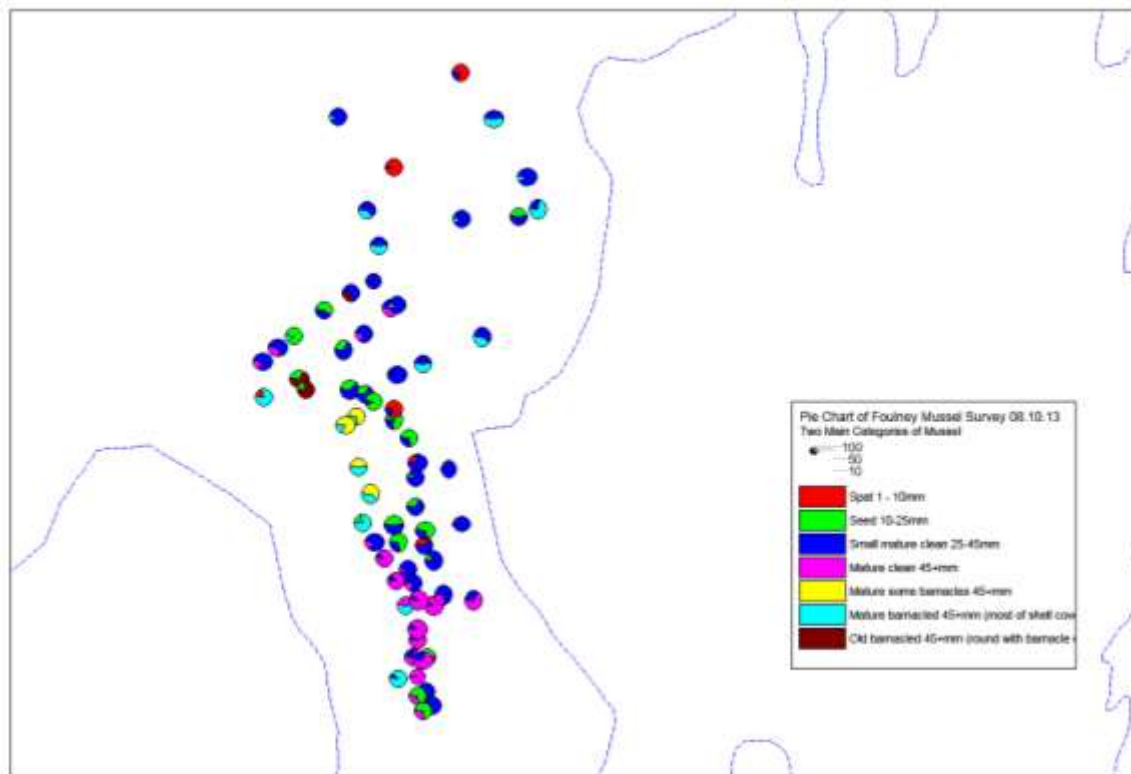


Fig. 1. Illustrative map of targeted Foulney mussel Survey 08-10-13 showing pie charts of percentage cover of the two main mussel categories

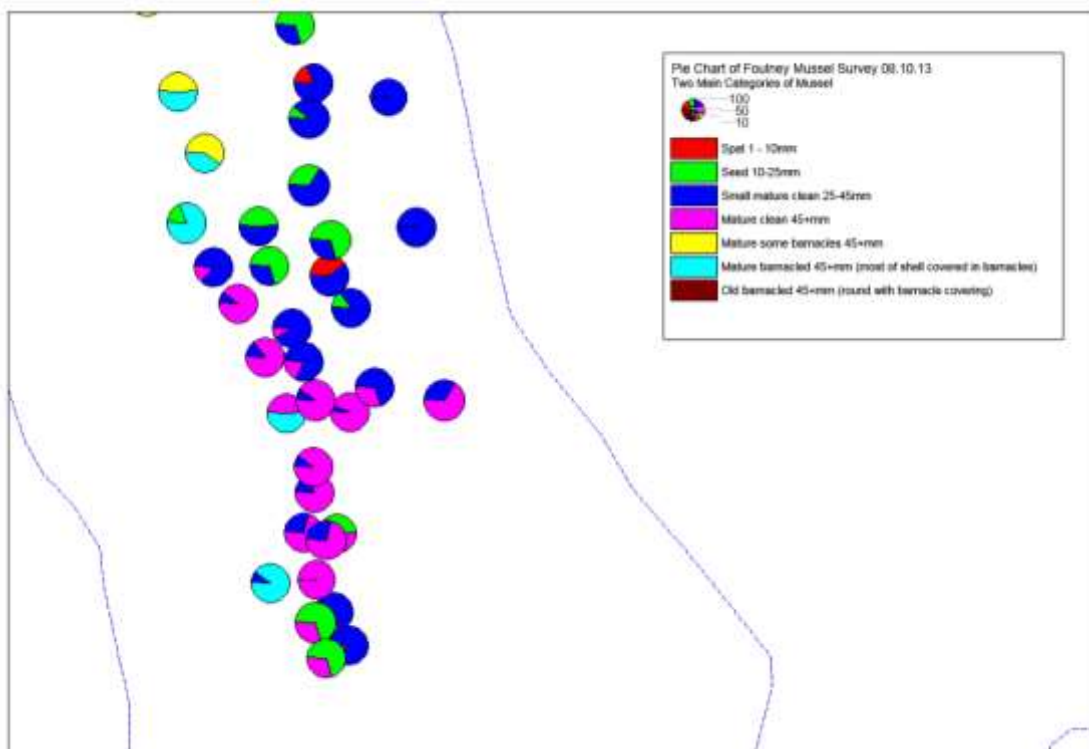


Fig. 2. Illustrative map of targeted Foulney mussel Survey 08-10-13 showing pie charts of percentage cover of the two main mussel categories - close-up of bottom end of skewer – ie. the main area of harvesting interest.

For fisheries management purposes this creates problems of enforcing the minimum landing size. Speaking to some hand-gatherers it is evident there is a market for all sizes of mussel even the stock <10mm. Buyers will use grading machines to sort the mussel. The smaller stock is fetching similar prices as the size mussel. As daylight is being lost it becomes harder for gatherers to separate size from undersize on the bed (ie using head torches).

At the time of writing Officers are intending to hold a meeting with Morecambe Bay stakeholders and Natural England to discuss options for mussel management at Foulney. A full verbal report of this meeting will be given.

Leasowe – Non-regulated Fishing of Intertidal Bivalves

Summary: Following the report to TSB on 16th August, samples of the on-regulated species of bivalves being harvested from the intertidal area at Leasowe were brought back for identification.

In mid-October IFCO Dixon also reported that ten Chinese people were seen gathering large bivalves from the Askam area of the Duddon Estuary for personal use. He obtained a specimen of the one species they were targeting, which is believed to be the Common Otter Shell *Lutraria lutraria*.

It is known that there is a sub-tidal population of this species in Liverpool Bay and it is not unreasonable to assume similar sub-tidal populations in other soft sandy areas of our District. There is no EU minimum landing size and harvesting by hand is currently not regulated.

There is a need to be pro-active in collecting data on the hand-gathering of all species that is occurring around the District and on the ecology of these organisms to ensure that the level of activity is sustainable. The science team would aim to target this next year. In the meantime IFCOs have been asked to closely monitor the level of activity and the species being collected.

Communications update

Joe Moulton

Summary: Since taking over in August the Communications Officer has been busy getting to grips with the role. Much of this has been enforcement related, sending text messages to cockle hand gatherers regarding Foulness, updating the website as well as attending meetings. A very well received presentation on NWIFCA and sustainable fishing in Morecambe Bay was given to the Marine Conservation Society in September. In recent weeks there has been a need to offer better communication to the angling community about NWIFCA and also Byelaw 5 (Heysham Bass Byelaw). Sufficient permanent signs have been put up at the Power Station and a meeting was organised with anglers in Morecambe at the Strathmore Hotel. The meeting was attended by 11 anglers and 2 members of the Port Police. Progress has been made on arranging a meeting with Chris Davies MEP regarding EU Bass Management Measures and other up and coming fishery matters within the European Parliament.

Mandy Knott

Senior Scientist and Morecambe Bay Fishery Order Officer

October 2013