

NWIFCA Quarterly Meeting

6 December 2013: 11.00 a.m.

**AGENDA
ITEM NO.
15**

SCIENCE REPORT **1ST SEPTEMBER – 21ST NOVEMBER**

GENERAL

Following interviews in October, which saw seven high standard candidates interviewed, Sarah Temple was appointed and took up her position on 4th November as new Science Officer. We welcome her to the Team and are busy carrying out her induction.

SURVEY AND FISHERIES WORK

Foulnaze Cockle Fishery Planning

Officers continued to attend multi-agency planning meetings during the open fishery and have provided support with enforcement when required. It is not anticipated that much stock remains on the bed but there is the intention to access and survey it in spring once the weather and daylight hours allow.

Other Cockle Beds – Ribble, Wirral and Morecambe Bay

In September Officers surveyed the area between Newbiggin and Roosebeck after reports of a cockle stock by the local IFCO. The results showed that there were patches of size cockle, as is usual on cockle beds, but that these patches were not large enough to support a commercial fishery.

Local IFCOs report to the Science Team on a regular basis on whether or not any settlement has been observed during their patrols on the other beds, and if so full surveys are implemented. To date no dense settlement has been reported on any of the District's cockle beds.

Morecambe Bay Mussel Beds

Heysham Flat

Following the last Authority meeting when members requested that Officers investigate issues around the limited number of ATV beach access permits issued by Lancaster City Council, Officers organised and facilitated a meeting with the Council's Promenade/Outdoor Facilities Manager and IFCOs. It was a positive meeting and it is anticipated that a way forward has been agreed for future years' fisheries.

The level of hand-gathering effort was relatively low, with two buyers involved. The fishery continued until the level of scouring, or the mussel hunkering back into the mud, made the fishing uneconomic to continue.

South America seed mussel

The seed mussel dredge fishery continued until 26th September with a total of just under 6000 tonnes harvested. Effort level had decreased throughout September, and although the authorisations issued were for the period up to 31st October the fishability of the stock and the economic return to operators precluded the necessity for that length of authorisation.

Foulney Mussels

Members will recall that in December 2012 Officers were discussing the complexities of managing the hand-gathered mussel fishery at Foulney Twist, north Morecambe Bay. The decision was taken by the TSB 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 this mussel bed, which contains areas of very mixed ages/sizes of mussel, over the summer months in time for the autumn and winter fishery. 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 of the mussel bed was carried out on 8th October and results show that as in 2012 the skear holds mussels of very mixed ages and sizes. There is a market for all size of mussel even the stock <10mm. Buyers will use grading machines to sort the mussel, as do some of the more progressive hand-gatherers on the beach. As daylight has been lost it becomes harder for gatherers to separate size from undersize on the bed (ie using head torches) without graders.

A stakeholder meeting was held on 28th October with an NE representative present. Officers listened to what stakeholders were requesting – however there were differences of opinion amongst them and no one management approach suggested. The issue was tabled at the TSB meeting and a proposal to investigate defining a line of demarcation of an area of highest proportion of size mussel, and allowing all mussel from this area to be fished, subject to HRA, was agreed. Subsequently Officers carried out a further inspection of the skear on 5th November with NE and industry reps. Unfortunately daylight was against the team and it was too dark to distinguish these areas. Management has consequently been kept at the status quo of enforcing the MLS.

Seasalter Oyster Farm

The Senior Scientist had a pre-arranged visit of the oyster hatchery on Walney and the oyster farm at Roosebeck, which is situated on land leased from Boughton Estates. Ms Knott and the Enforcement Director were received as guests of Kelsey Thompson, Manager of Seasalter (Walney) Ltd. on 17th October. The MBFO Management Plan was discussed briefly and NWIFCA Officers observed the issues around the build-up of mussel and mussel mud under and around the oyster trestles on the beach.

A few days prior to this meeting Officers were notified by Kingfisher Seafoods that they were planning on working as agents for Seasalter in the removal of fouling mussel from on and around the trestles and would use Byelaw 3 permit holders. Authorisations for removal of fouling mussel have been issued to the oyster farm in many years in the past by the NW&NWSFC. Seasalter also required SSSI consent from Natural England and Officers worked with NE to issue both as quickly as possible.

There subsequently arose serious issues which relate back to a long-standing dispute over fishery rights on Boughton Estate land. The Head of Enforcement has more details in his report. However it has highlighted the need and urgency for the MBFO under which these kinds of issues can be managed. A meeting between the Senior Scientist, Head of Enforcement, Mr Chris Sparrow (Agent for Boughton Estate) and Kelsey Thompson was held on 15th November, and although no settlement was found over the immediate issues, all parties agreed to the importance of the MBFO in providing a mechanism for resolving these issues for the future and their commitment to furthering the progress of the Order.

Clam Hand Gathering at Leasowe

Samples of the unregulated species of bivalves being harvested from the intertidal area at Leasowe were brought back for identification. In mid-October IFCO Dixon also reported that 10 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 and record the level of activity and the species being collected.

Roa Island Seagrass

An Officer attended a Natural England survey of the seagrass beds in the Roa Island area of the Walney Channel. This survey updated the seagrass data from 1999 that was previously used to inform closed areas for the proposed Byelaw 6. With this data, two areas were added to the Byelaw and a third area was discounted (see paper from 20 September Authority meeting).

PROJECT WORK

EUROPEAN MARINE SITES – REVIEW OF FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

Work has continued on the long running review of fishing activities in our District's European Marine Sites. This work has been mainly focused on reviewing and amending the NWIFCA Byelaw 6. The additional seagrass beds have been added. The Lune Deep reef has also been a major focus. Officers have been in regular contact with Mr Gary Mitchinson, the fisherman that works the area, via phone and a visit to his vessel to gain more information about the way he fishes and how a closed area would affect his livelihood. Solutions to this issue have been investigated, including the drafting of a closed area with a sunset clause and a corresponding Appropriate Assessment of current level of activity on the reef feature (see Agenda item 11).

Officers have been involved in regular national level telephone meetings with the Defra-led EMS Working Group. The EMS project was the main focus of this year's TAG conference (see below).

After the confirmation of the NWIFCA Byelaw 6, officers will work to ensure the formal public consultation is well publicised.

The next stage in this process (looking at Amber and Green risk activities) will run until 2016. This will begin with an assessment of the fishing activities occurring in EMS in our district, and prioritisation of those with most concern or data deficiencies. Subsequently it is proposed to discuss with partner agencies further the practicalities of collaborative working to generate the data to fill the data and knowledge gaps, and to draw up a plan of prioritised work for the year ahead.

MCZ DESIGNATION – TRANCHE ONE

Following months of waiting on news of MCZ designation, in October Officers were asked to take part in telecons regarding the First Tranche of MCZ designations, drafting of factsheets on each site and commenting on a 'prioritisation tool' developed by Defra and Natural England. The NWIFCA has two MCZ designated on 21st November – Cumbria Coast MCZ and Fylde MCZ, both of which have the conservation objective to maintain current favourable status and therefore have low priority in terms of introducing management measures.

Officers met with Dave Limpenny from Cefas — Programme Manager of the Defra Marine Biodiversity Board - who is meeting with all 10 IFCAs to explore how best to ensure the most effective engagement of IFCAs, Cefas and NE in data collection for the ongoing MCZ process.

It is proposed to develop the science work around the MCZ work (other sites within the District will be designated in future tranches) alongside the EMS Review work under a broader Marine Protected Area approach.

MORECAMBE BAY HYBRID FISHERY ORDER

Further drafts of the Statutory Instrument (SI) have been provided by Defra legal, and Natural England have provided their comments on the updating of the Management Plan for the Order. It is intended that following the forthcoming meeting arranged for 11th December where Members are invited to discuss and agree the detail of the Management Plan that these updates can be incorporated and a final draft SI can be agreed with Defra. The Order will then go out to formal consultation for a period of one month. If no substantial or irreconcilable objections are received by the Minister the Order will be granted. Otherwise the Minister would appoint an inspector to hold a Public Inquiry.

CUMBRIA WILDLIFE TRUST MARINE GRADUATES SCHEME

The partnership work between NWIFCA and Cumbria Wildlife Trust is being further strengthened through a formal partnership agreement, and their bid for a further three years funding for a Heritage Lottery Funded 'Marine and Coastal Heritage Programme' between 2014 and 2017. This will enable us to continue training and supervising four marine graduates a year in surveying mussels, cockles and *Sabellaria alveolata* at Heysham Flat. A three year comparative study of the latter is in production, and a report on a desk top study carried out on pearl formation in mussels in the Walney Channel has been published on both organisations websites.

RAZOR CLAM FISHERY DEVELOPMENT

There has been little movement with the Cefas Fisheries Science Partnership funded project after delays in gear construction and gaining permissions from other agencies. Officers have been in regular contact with Dr Dave Palmer of Cefas to ensure that they are kept up to date with the progress of this project.

It is now expected that the practical work and data collection will begin in January 2014.

TAG CONFERENCE

In November all Science Officers attended the two day national IFCA Technical Advisory Group conference in Scarborough. This conference was an opportunity for all science staff from the IFCAs as well as other organisations such as Natural England, MMO, Cefas, EA and Defra to meet and discuss the issues facing them in the coming year.

The conference particularly focused on the Amber assessment process for the EMS Fisheries Review and how the IFCAs and other organisations can work together to tackle the mammoth task. Discussions included reviewing draft assessments completed by various IFCAs, the formation of working groups to research important gear type impacts and collaborative working to fill data gaps.

The conference concluded with a TAG meeting.

Officers also went on a site visit to Flamborough Head to find out how this EMS is managed and plans for future assessment and management of fishing activity. Yorkshire Wildlife Trust hosted the visit and explained how they were working with fishermen to improve public awareness of their fishing practices and product.

PROJECT INSHORE

The Senior Scientist met with Cath Dobson, Hugh Thinnesen and Dr. Oliver Tully from the Fisheries Ecosystems Advisory Services at Galway Marine Institute who is one of the Project Inshore consultants (shellfish expert). The meeting's aim was to discuss the findings of the Project Inshore Stage Two Report including the MSC pre-assessment of NWIFCA shellfish stocks (cockle, mussel, crab and lobster), to review and discuss the MSC Harvest Strategy and the drafting of the Stage Three Report. Officers raised concerns about apparent inaccuracies and omissions of detail about our current management of shellfish stocks. The Senior Scientist also made a request that Officers are fully involved in the drafting of the Stage Three report, and that recommendations made within this report to improve our management provide clear and practical ways forward, recognising resource implications. There is a tight timescale for turn-around of drafts to final documents, which Officers have commented on in light of other work priorities and having detailed input, bearing in mind that there is potential for great public interest in the final documents from this project.

AUTHORISATIONS AND CONSULTATIONS

Environment Agency – WFD – Mersey and Ribble surveys
Victrex Manufacturing Ltd (Fleetwood) - environmental permit consultation
Mersey Docks Dredging Licence - renewal consultation
Mersey Gateway Bridge – MMO Marine Licence consultation
Salford University Shrimp Study - Facultative sex change in the brown shrimp, *Crangon crangon*
Tracer Investigation Harrowside Outfall – consultation
Wyre Outfall – repair works consultation
Ormonde Wind farm Monitoring – Brown & May Trawl Surveys

MEETINGS, WORKSHOPS AND COURSES ATTENDED

North West Shellfish Liaison meeting
Angling Trust – Bait Collection Summit – Fishmonger Hall – London
Solway Firth Partnership
Morecambe Bay EMS Management Group
Celtic Seas Partnership Workshop – Liverpool
TSB Meeting
FLOWW Working Group – Dial-in

COMMUNICATIONS

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 Foulhaze, 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.

Science Officers
21st November 2013