

NWIFCA Technical, Science and Byelaw Sub-Committee

7th February 2014: 10:00am

**REPORT
NUMBER**

8

DREDGING OF SIZE MUSSEL IN NORTH MORECAMBE BAY

Purpose of Report

To consider a consent request

Recommendations

1. A consent be approved subject to:
 - I. A survey to determine the overall stock of mussels and the amount that is fishable
 - II. An HRA (Habitats Regulations Assessment) to determine the sustainability of the fishery
 - III. Agreement on management and verification arrangements

Proposal

2. Mr Robert Butler of Newbiggin, Cumbria has requested consent to dredge size mussels from the channel between the intertidal mussel skear at Foulney and the South America skear. This mussel bed is not accessible by quad bike or foot.
3. A maximum of 3 ton per week of size mussel would be taken by a single vessel (Lizzie B BW263 registered 7.5m overall) using a 1m width baird dredge on neap low tides.

Demand survey, stock assessment and stock quality

4. Industry reports continuing high demand for mussel of all sizes for relaying, including stock that contains a low proportion of pearled mussel. Mr Butler has stated that the mussels would be sold to live market. The bed has a long term B classification.
5. Stock in this channel has not been surveyed so the biomass present and its condition is unknown. Some 2012 mussel remained on the northern part of South America skear in 2013 which was excluded from the area authorised as a seed mussel fishery, and therefore not fished. This may have grown to size. Mr Butler reports a trawler skipper saying he brought up a large quantity of very large mussels in the cod end from the South America/Foulney area.
6. The quality may be in doubt as it is commonly found that sized mussel on Foulney has become pearled.

Management considerations

7. The NWIFCA and previously the NW&NWSFC has generally not supported mechanical harvesting of size mussel in the past because of the priority to protect hand worked fisheries and the risk of over fishing leading to environmental damage. In recent years the NWIFCA has required seed mussel to be dredged with 'eco-dredges' as used on South America Skear in 2013. These have a much reduced impact on the seabed compared with the much heavier Baird Dredge and should be required for this fishery.

8. If one operator is consented, other operators are likely to apply. There may be seven under 10m licensed boats in the Barrow area and 21 vessels applied for authorisation to fish size mussel in the Solway in 2011. In order to maintain sustainable fishing, NWIFCA would have to maintain a high level of control over the number of vessels, the catch levels and amount of fishing. Fishing would have to be within limits set under the HRA, including what proportion of biomass could be removed without of risk of exceeding safe biological limits.
9. Consideration must be given to other mussel beds within Morecambe Bay and the immediate vicinity. IFCOs have reported that the Fleetwood beds have been scoured down to bare stone by the recent storms.
10. The fishery is already open for the use of rakes from boats by Byelaw 3 permit holders. This method would be expected to attract only a small number of gatherers thereby limiting the damage caused by the fishery and safeguarding the broodstock.
11. Mr Butler would be asked to assist the Science Team to obtain samples, to provide survey data on stock levels and distribution, and quality of mussels by raking from the boat.
12. In summary, determination of this consent request would require an assessment of stock levels, assessment of how much could be removed within sustainable limits and preparation of an HRA (Habitats Regulations Assessment). An HRA must be agreed with Natural England.

Mandy Knott
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29th January 2014