

NWIFCA Quarterly Meeting

11 December 2012: 11.00 a.m.

**AGENDA
ITEM NO.
12**

SCIENCE REPORT

1ST AUGUST TO 23RD NOVEMBER 2012

GENERAL

This quarter a large proportion of Science Team time has been devoted to the Foulnaze and Penfold Channel cockle fisheries, and in acting as stand-by for the Enforcement team. We have also been affected by a certain amount of staff sickness which has impacted on the team's ability to deal with the ever-increasing workload, particularly in terms of consultations.

SURVEY AND FISHERIES WORK

Foulnaze Cockle Survey and Fishery Planning

Having been heavily involved in the planning for the Foulnaze cockle fishery Science Officers assisted with enforcement at Seaford Road slipway for the first few days of the fishery and were on stand-by for further enforcement duties if required. We facilitated the multi-agency de-brief meeting, and conducted the post-August fishery survey which informed the Habitats Regulations Assessment and the decision to extend the fishery into October.

South Gut and Penfold Channel Cockle Surveys

Officers conducted a series of surveys on the cockle beds at South Gut and the Penfold Channel, and carried out the Habitats Regulations Assessment for this fishery. Officers also attended the multi-agency planning meeting.

Morecambe Bay Mussel Beds

Heysham Flat

Following a survey of the mussel bed on Heysham Flat and requests from the industry to harvest seed mussel, an Appropriate Assessment was carried out in agreement with Natural England to allow hand-gathering to begin once the seed had reached a fishable state. Preliminary work was carried out with partner agencies to ensure a smooth process and the fishery opened on 26th September. A maximum of 20 permit holders prosecuted the fishery on any day, with an average of 12. 20 tonnes (average) was harvested each day with between 150 – 200 tonnes having been removed in total. A post fishing inspection of the bed on 29th October showed that some scouring by weather had occurred, and that the seed mussel that remained had receded back into the mud and was no longer fishable.

South America and Falklands

2012 saw an almost unprecedented settlement of mussel all around Morecambe Bay skears. Industry reports suggested the seed resource on the South America and Falklands beds (north Morecambe Bay) to be of the highest density and greatest quality that can be remembered. Consequently a boat dredge fishery was authorised from the beginning of August following on-foot inspections and fly-

overs aided by the industry, and after agreement with Natural England over the Habitats Regulations Assessment. Eight authorisations were issued though only six of these were worked, with three boats exporting seed to Northern Ireland, two to the Menai Strait and one local boat relaying within the District. An on-foot inspection on 1st October provided visual evidence of the amount of stock remaining and the fishery authorisations were extended. Science Officers have assisted alongside IFCOs with Cefas fish health inspections for the exported consignments.

Although Science Officers were unable to take part in a post-fishing fly-over inspection we facilitated Natural England attendance to witness first-hand the extent of mussel biomass that remained after fishing – estimated as more or less equal to biomass pre-fishing which lends support to the hypothesis that thinning densely-packed seed mussel has the effect of improving stock. Just under 12400 tonnes has been harvested in total. The fishery remains open until the end of December. One boat is working it at present.

Silloth Mussels

Officers joined forces with IFCOs from Whitehaven aboard the Solway Protector in November to carry out a survey on mussel beds in the Silloth Channel. Industry boats were requesting permits to dredge size mussel should stocks allow. Unfortunately despite early encouraging samples these soon reduced to none to very low volumes of mussels and the stock is deemed not sufficient to support a commercial fishery, even low key, this year.

SEA ANGLING 2012

The Sea Angling 2012 project has continued to run smoothly during the 3rd and 4th quarters of the project. The number of anglers encountered has remained consistent throughout and the vast majority readily agreed to participate in the survey. As in the first half of the project, the number of boat anglers encountered has remained low in comparison to the shore angling surveys. However, slight changes to the site-selection methodology have improved the number of boat encounters somewhat. A number of other factors, particularly the poor weather over the summer have been cited as reasons for low numbers of boats encountered.

In total, 19 surveys were carried out during the period 1 August to 23rd November, 10 surveying shore anglers and 9 targeting boats, bringing the total to 41. Surveys have been scheduled until the end of the year, and will be shortly programmed for the last two months until March 2013.

PROJECT WORK

SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES REVIEW

1 Project Inshore

Officers met with Matt Watson from the Marine Stewardship Council to discuss and find out more about the project. A request for data was subsequently received and Officers collated and provided information to the Project Inshore consultants to allow them to undertake Stage One of the process (“Project Inshore will look to analyse all inshore commercial fisheries (0-6nm) and their markets”). This included a visit to the Whitehaven office to share information about the project and gather reports and data for Cumbria. Officers have had input into the Stage One report and amendments have been made particularly around the reported landings for UK cockle and mussel fisheries. The report will be a public document available at: <http://www.seafish.org/fishermen/fishing/project-inshore/project-reports>

Stage Two has now begun, and Officers from Whitehaven and Carnforth met with the Project Inshore lead and consultants Rod Cappell and Ollie Tully to discuss sustainability issues around the key fisheries identified in the NWIFCA District. These are: brill, plaice, sole, turbot, thornback ray, cockles, mussels, scallop, lobster, crab, nephrops, brown shrimp, whelk and periwinkle. Finfish and nephrops fisheries will be assessed on a national scale. During Stage Two a series of stakeholder engagement meetings are proposed around the District.

2 Sustainability Studentship

This 3 year project to develop tools for supporting enhanced sustainability in the marine environment is in partnership with Liverpool University and CMACS Marine Environmental consultancy. A PhD student has been appointed – Sophia Kochalski – under the supervision of Prof Chris Frid, and has begun work assimilating past data held by NWIFCA on cockle fisheries within the District. Science Officers will assist in directing the work of the project, and providing time to Sophia as the work progresses.

RAZOR CLAM FISHERY DEVELOPMENT

Work has continued by Science Officers to look at ways in which to develop a razor clam fishery. 2 meetings have taken place between Science Working Party, science officers and operators. Actions points from these have included further collation of information surrounding alternative gear types and looking into MMO licensing and dispensation. The methodology has been drawn up and is being circulated for comment.

BYELAW 3 REVIEW

Officers have assisted the CEO in facilitating the special TSB Byelaw 3 Review meeting.

WILDLIFE TRUST MARINE GRADUATES SCHEME

Officers continue to work with the Marine Graduates, who have assisted the NWIFCA in surveying and mapping the honeycomb worm reef at Heysham Flat which is an IFCA action under the Morecambe Bay EMS Management Plan. Data produced from these surveys was used in assessing potential impacts for the Heysham Flat seed mussel fishery. One of the MGs is carrying out a desk-top study into mussels and pearling including an analysis of historical work conducted by the old Lancashire SFC labs at Piel. We are also pleased to welcome Joseph Moulton from the MGs as a new IFCO and hope that the grounding he had with the Science Team will assist him in carrying out his future IFCO duties.

MEDIN

Officers began creating metadata records for NWIFCA data. A metadata record for the Cumbrian Shore Surveys was uploaded to the MEDIN portal and this is now available to view by the public. This is an on-going project where gradually historical datasets will be assimilated into metadata and uploaded to MEDIN.

TAG (TECHNICAL ADVISORY GROUP) CONFERENCE – 17th & 18th October. There had been a large amount of preparatory work from all IFCAs for this conference hosted by Devon and Severn IFCA.

All Science Officers attended this national IFCA two-day conference focussing on fisheries impacts on European Marine Sites and populating the risk matrix being drawn-up and fed into the Implementation Group at Defra. All fisheries within EMS in the District were included in the matrix.

There were also useful presentations on standard operating procedures and IFCA projects. We intend to review our current survey methodologies in light of information on how other IFCA's survey.

AUTHORISATIONS AND CONSULTATIONS

National Grid North West Coast Connections Consultation

On-going consultation over potential routing of the high voltage cables from the proposed new nuclear power station north of Sellafield continues. Following assessment of feedback including our submission, it appears that a route across Morecambe Bay is back on the agenda, having looked to have been previously ruled out. The three options still on the table include:

1. overhead cabling - very unlikely to go ahead;
2. laying of cables in shallow trenches with rock armouring. Officers have impressed most strongly that this option has the potential to change the ecology of the Bay and is not acceptable;
3. tunneling the cables from Barrow to Heysham. Depending on the design and number of tunnels this might prove to be an acceptable option. Tunneling would minimise risk of the effects of electro-magnetic fields on marine life. They could run two connecting tunnels across the Bay and avoid the need for any physical structures on the surface. Alternatively they would need three vents (escape routes for maintenance crew) that potentially could stand 10m above spring high water mark (ie. height of 20m above seabed). Again Officers have impressed our strong objections to placing any physical structures that could affect coastal processes.

National Grid is also looking at other sub-sea routes off Cumbria for part of the cabling corridors. These would be buried 2 – 3m below seabed. There would be initial interruption to fishing grounds during construction but then the ground would return to previous condition.

Realistically there is a very real possibility that both of these options will be included in the final round of submissions. The general public is less likely to be as concerned about subsea cables than overland routing considering the high national interest in the Lake District National Park.

Officers are grateful for the contributions made by Brian Crawford to this process who has been attending meetings and reporting back to the team when Officers have been unavailable to attend.

MEETINGS, WORKSHOPS AND COURSES ATTENDED

Birds and Shellfish Meeting – also attended by Chair and CEO to discuss and identify with Natural England and the RSPB current evidence used to inform advice on SPA bird conservation issues in relation to shellfish management

English Aquaculture Industry Consultation Workshop Defra – Ms Knott attended.

Shellfish Liaison Meeting – 19th September. Written report and attendance.

Dee Liaison Meeting – Ms Knott attended.

Natural England – CEO and Science Officers attended to discuss proposed changes in the way Natural England delivers its advice on European Marine Sites.

SUSFISH (Shellfish productivity in the Irish Sea: working towards a sustainable future) Workshop – Ms Knott attended.

Lake District National Park IT– Training by LDNP on computer and new e-mail use.

Solway Firth Partnership AGM and Conference – Ms Leadbeater attended.

First Aid at Work – Ms Leadbeater and Mr Lindop have both attended three-day Red Cross First Aid courses.

IFCA Byelaws Workshop – CEO and Ms Ake attended a meeting in London with MMO, DEFRA and Natural England to discuss progress on IFCA Byelaw review and byelaw making.

Liverpool City Region Deal meeting – Ms Ake attended a meeting with various organisations including MMO, EA and Local Authorities to look at improving environmental knowledge through collaboration.

ADDITIONAL

Development of data sets for MapInfo for mapping with NWIFCA

Creation of MMO Current/on-going consultations with the district

Creation of protocol and application form for request for dispensations

Management and editing of computer files in preparation for IT change over.

General data and information requests from industry and other sources.

General vehicle and equipment maintenance and renewal

COMMUNICATIONS

The Communications Officer gave presentations at two conferences. One was at the European conference 'Delivering Sustainable Coasts' hosted by the North West Coastal Forum, on 'Challenges to Managing Sustainable Fisheries and a Healthy Marine Environment'. The second was the running of a workshop at the NW Wildlife Trust's Marine Day, which included a presentation on Fishing in the Irish Sea (and MCZs) and a facilitated discussion on the challenges of balancing the need to create sustainable fisheries with protecting the marine environment. At both events the NWIFCA had an exhibits stand. Both presentations received positive feedback and were useful springboards for the IFCA to engage with a wider range of stakeholders.

A meeting between the NWIFCA and the commercial fishers of Morecambe Bay was held at the end of November, giving fishers the opportunity to voice questions, comments and concerns over fisheries management in the Bay. 21 fishers attended and a note of the meeting will be produced and will be available on the website.

**Science Officers
November 2012**