

**North Western Inshore Fisheries and
Conservation Authority**

Annual Meeting: 12 June 2012

Morecambe Town Hall: 11.00 a.m.

**AGENDA
ITEM NO.
13**

SCIENCE REPORT

1ST FEBRUARY TO 30TH APRIL 2012

GENERAL

This last quarter has been extremely busy due to Bob Houghton leaving in mid-March. This has had a substantial impact upon officer workload and has made planning and reacting to new pieces of work difficult. Strict prioritisation of officer work load and our degree of involvement with projects has been scaled back. The new Science and Communications Officer Alasdair Lindop started in April and will be responsible for the Sea Angling 2012 Project.

Survey work has begun on cockle beds and monitoring for spat, where both mussel and cockle is being recorded. A large amount of this quarter's work has been centred on looking at accessing Foulnaze cockle beds to assess stocks.

SURVEY AND FISHERIES WORK

West Kirkby Undersize Mussel Fishery

The activity on the mussel bed was monitored by the IFCO. A request was received from industry to extend the authorisation period. Work was done with Natural England to look at the potential for extension with consideration for the concerns over Chinese Mitten crabs. Survey work was conducted at the end of February to look at stock and found that there was still a large amount left. Concerns were raised by local stakeholders regarding the activity and Science and IFCO officers attended a meeting with local councillors. The authorisation was not extended due to issues with access to the site, concerns from the RSPB and Chinese Mitten Crab. Further work is required to look at managing this fishery in the future.

North Wirral Cockle Beds Surveys

Surveys were conducted over 3 days during February with the aid of the local IFCOs and Mersey Port Health Authority Officers. A full report regarding results and status of these beds will be given to the TSB Sub-Committee.

Clam Fishery Trial and Development

Work towards look at developing a Clam Fishery has been slow due to high demand of officer time. Several discussions have been held with Natural England, Operators, and the RSPB and Authority members regarding the issue. Research into existing clam fisheries and work towards an outline of the structure of the development and research requirements has been started, and a report given to the TSB.

Ribble and Foulnaze Surveys

A further attempt was made in February to access the Foulnaze bed by Science Officers using the "Drie Gebroeders" which was aborted due to fog. Work has been done to look at alternative methods of accessing and surveying the bed including grab sampling from the "Solway Protector" and use of a

hovercraft. Officers hope to further the survey work in May. Penfold Channel and South Gut were surveyed at the start of February by Science Officers over 2 days.

Sea Angling 2012

Surveys have started. Mapping and paperwork has been prepared for IFCOs to complete the surveys. Helen Ake has completed the handover to Alasdair Lindop regarding the work. The site selection for 2nd quarter is completed. Monthly reporting to CEFAS has started and both above officers attended a workshop for the project.

Mussel Monitoring

Mussel beds within Morecambe Bay have been monitored for signs of potential seed mussel fisheries and *Sabellaria* growth at Heysham Flat.

PROJECT WORK

Sustainable Fisheries Review - Work has progressed in drawing together more detailed information from the Enforcement Director and Fishery Officers on fisheries within the NWIFCA District, particularly in relation to whitefish. This has been a useful exercise, and has enabled Officers, along with ideas from TSB Members, to put together some outline project proposals for a potential funding source, the Co-operative Social Goals Fund, which is targeting the north of England (excluding Northumberland) and projects working to 'Conserve Biodiversity'.

We are also still awaiting news on a funding bid for 'Project Inshore', a national project overseen by the Marine Stewardship Council, which will provide resources to assess all England's inshore fisheries against MSC pre-assessment criteria. A full report will be presented to the TSB.

Cockle Genetics Study – Officers have been involved in supplying cockles from the Ribble and Morecambe Bay for genetic analysis, along with cockles from other fisheries in the Irish Sea (Wales and Ireland) for a project under the SUSFISH umbrella with Aberystwyth University. A meeting during a handover with academics will hopefully lead to furthering links with Bangor University School of Ocean Science and others.

Non-Native Species – Officers are finding that the issue of how non-natives impact on NWIFCA fisheries, particularly Chinese Mitten Crab, is becoming more and more pertinent. A full report will be presented to the TSB on the recommendation that the NWIFCA develops a Biosecurity Plan for non-natives and shellfish disease.

Pipelines and Windfarms - Mapping work is on-going to gather all existing data sets of existing and proposed pipelines within the NWIFCA District. Officers are involved in collating data on the monitoring of construction of current wind farms and post construction work.

Authorisations and Consultations

Authorisation Requests – a not insignificant proportion of Officers time is spent responding to requests from a variety of consultancies engaged in survey and monitoring work around the District (particularly in relation to energy production). Officers liaise with Natural England on likely significant effect on any European Marine Sites and draft byelaw derogations / authorisations. Recently this work has included the North Irish Sea Benthic Monitoring Programme, Walney and West of Duddon Sands wind farm monitoring, and EMS Condition Monitoring Morecambe Bay Intertidal Surveys.

Consultations

NWIFCA is a statutory consultee within the MMO Marine Licensing process. We are consulted on various stages of the planning process including the requirement for Environmental Impacts assessments, IPC applications and standard marine works. This period has included – Ormonde Wind farm export cable remedial works and Walney 1 and 2 farms export cable remedial works and additional construction works. A start has been made on the Burbo Bank Wind farm Extension formal consultation as part of the Planning Act.

Meetings, Workshops and Courses Attended

National Grid Stakeholders meeting – Officers have attended stakeholder consultation meetings on routing of the proposed new high power network. Currently there is only one transmission circuit in Cumbria which runs parallel to the M6. NuGen are proposing to build a 3.6GW nuclear power station at Moorside near Sellafield. That amount of power cannot be accommodated on the existing distribution network. National Grid need to establish a new transmission network in the west of Cumbria and connect to the existing transmission network. They have been consulting on proposed ‘corridors’ for the route for over 12 months. All of the corridors they are investigating now have a marine element to them. National Grid have now completed their options appraisal work and the drafting of their Preliminary Strategic Options Report (PSOR). They are now ready to launch the Stage 1 Consultation which will run until the end of July.

Marine Spatial Planning Meeting – MMO (in Blackpool). England has been divided into 11 marine plan areas and the East Inshore and East Offshore areas were the first areas in England to be selected for marine planning. It will take until 2019/20 before planning for all marine plan areas has been completed. The MMO is now tasked with deciding on the next plan area to work with. An announcement about the location of the next area is expected in early summer 2012.

This meeting was hosted by the North West Coastal Forum and the Wildlife Trusts. Around 50 stakeholders representing a variety of interests were present and voiced the opinion that the North West should be considered for the next round of planning. Defra has a list of selection criteria for plan areas:

- Stakeholder engagement in plan area selection
- Assessment of coastal stakeholder partnerships
- Technical report of economic, environmental and social information
- Implications of current and proposed marine protected areas
- Future pressures and their implications
- Implications of planning inshore and offshore together
- Implications of planning with bordering nations

The North West Coastal Forum agreed to co-ordinate the work of making representations to Defra.

FLOWW (Fishing Liaison with Offshore Wind & Wet Renewables Group) Meeting – March. A full report to be presented to the TSB.

Technical Advisory Group (TAG) Meeting, April. A full report to be presented to the TSB.

Sea Angling 2012 Workshop – April. Report within the Sea Angling 2012 Project Report.

VHF Marine Radio Course – Both current science officers attended the course and gained licence to use VHF Radios in March.

Ribble Lifework Shop – Helen Ake attended a day workshop held by Environment Agency in March. There is no required involvement for subsequent workshops.

Byelaw Making Workshop – MMO, April. Helen Ake accompanied the CEO to become more familiar with Byelaw making procedures, use of Impact Assessments and the IFCA byelaw review.

Dee Mussels – March. Mandy Knott accompanied the CEO to a meeting with Andrew Miller MP and local fishermen over the West Kirby mussel fishery.

Shellfish Liaison meeting – Officers provide written report and attendance, and in addition have supplied information on request regarding the closure of the Morecambe Bay beds due to the Middleton outfall failure and sewage spill, following liaison with fishermen affected.

RSPB – Meeting was held to discuss setting up of a forum for environmental / conservation groups to input into fisheries management. A full report is presented to the TSB.

Preesall Underground Gas Storage Application – An Officer attended the Preliminary Meeting in relation to the application for a Development Consent Order by Halite Energy Group for an underground gas storage facility at Preesall, Lancashire convened by the IPC (Infrastructure Planning Commission). The meeting looked at how the application will be examined, procedural decisions and the initial questions that the Examining authority is asking. A note of the Preliminary Meeting along with an audio recording will be published on the IPC website (<http://infrastructure.planningportal.gov.uk/projects/north-west/preesall-saltfield-underground-gas-storage/>), and made available for inspection at various venues. A letter laying out the timetable for decision making has subsequently been received and the deadline for written submission (ie our case) is 6th June. The process is predominantly a written one, with hearings only being held if and when the Examining Authority think there is merit and need around specific issues. The examination will close on 25 October 2012, whereupon the Examining Authority has 3 months to report to the Secretary of State. A final decision on the application should be made by 25th April 2013.

Arnside and Silverdale AONB 40th Anniversary AGM – Officers attended this celebratory AGM.

Additional Work

- Officers have completed general quad bike maintenance as well as delivering the Quads for servicing.
- Further sorting of the library and removal and delivery of Welsh relating documents was completed.
- Work was carried out for the review of the Annual Plan and production of the 2012/2013 Science Plan.

**Science Officers
May 2012**