

NWIFCA ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM

Purpose of Report

To inform members of the development of a NWIFCA Environmental Forum.

Recommendations

That the report be received and that members endorse the actions of Officers.

Background

1. Concerns had been raised by environmental bodies, in particular the RSPB, about the impacts of recent cockle fisheries (Leasowe and Ribble) on European Marine Site features especially habitats and bird feeding requirements.
2. During consultations over the Morecambe Bay Fishery Order and its Appropriate Assessment a two-tier approach to working with environmental and conservation organisations was adopted, which all parties involved with felt worked well.
3. NWIFCA Officers have worked and continue to work extensively with Natural England and the RSPB over the Eider Risk Review, where seed mussel harvesting in north Morecambe Bay had been flagged up as a 'medium' risk to eider feeding requirements.
4. The IFCA's new duties under the MACA 2009 require additional work into fisheries management measures in relation to conservation objectives.
5. Science Officers consider it timely and beneficial to continue to develop dialogue with environmental agencies to promote better understanding of fisheries issues.

Progress to Date

6. A meeting was held on 28th March between NWIFCA Science Officers, Natural England and the RSPB.
7. It was agreed to set up a NWIFCA Environmental Forum which will advise on and support the NWIFCA in its fisheries and conservation duties and which can draw in relevant expertise when required. Officers will provide written reports on its work to the TSB.
8. It was agreed to adopt a two-tier approach:

- a) a strategic working group consisting of representatives from the NWIFCA Science team, Natural England, RSPB, the Wildlife Trusts and the Environment Agency, whose remit will be to look at issues in the broad environmental picture and come up with recommendations to bring back to the NWIFCA.
 - b) when a fishery is developing in a particular area to set up a more localised working group working with a wider range of organisations and stakeholders.
9. That the District be divided geographically into 7 areas consisting of:
 - Dee / Wirral;
 - Mersey;
 - Ribble;
 - Morecambe Bay / Duddon Estuary;
 - Cumbria coast;
 - Solway;
 - Liverpool Bay
10. That the NWIFCA Communications Officer be tasked with servicing this forum and to compile an initial contact lists of all relevant organisations and stakeholders within these areas for such time as they are needed.
11. The first full EF meeting was held on 22nd May, where Terms of Reference were agreed (to be tabled on the day of the TSB meeting once the draft minutes have been approved by EF members). The following issues were also discussed:
 - Ribble Estuary cockle fishery 2012;
 - 20 per m² density and parameters for defining a cockle bed (initial discussion started);
 - Morecambe Bay Shellfishery Hybrid Fishery Order update;
 - South America seed mussel bed (initial discussion started);
 - stakeholder directory.

Science and Morecambe Bay Fishery Order Officer
23rd May 2012