

Summary Report on Meeting with Silloth Mussel Fishermen – 11-08-14

Apologies to members for the brevity of this report and its note format. This is due to time constraints in an effort to ensure Members are informed of latest developments before the TSB meeting.

NWIFCA Officers -	Mandy Knott
	Abigail Leadbeater
	Andrew Deary
	Eric Thinnesen
	Hugh Thinnesen
	Jason Sparks
	Cath Dobson
NWIFCA Member -	Tony Markley
Silloth Fishermen -	Daniel Baxter
	Jamie Baxter
	Anthony Baxter
	John Watson
	Jake Watson
	Darren Scott
	A Bennett

MK summarised why the NWIFCA were considering authorising a sub-tidal mussel survey to be carried out in the Solway by a Menai Strait mussel dredge vessel, and that the paper put to the TSB was drawn up from information gathered from historical Cumbria SFC documents and reports. It would be useful to get the local fishermen's view on the history and how they wanted the mussel resource to be managed, and that this would be relayed to TSB Members for the meeting on 15th August 2014.

John Watson gave this information:

- the sub-tidal bed is around one mile long and 200 yards wide
- he has previously supplied the science team with co-ordinates for a 'box' around the bed
- the bed starts around 50 yards from the edge of the low water line – ie it's a very narrow strip
- general feeling is they doubt there is much mussel there at the moment and that it may have been over estimated in the past – partly due to lack of capacity to survey it scientifically

- previous estimates were based on assumption that the whole area has the same density of mussel whereas in reality it is likely to be patchy
- it may only get fished 1 in 3 years
- the settlement in 93-94 when it was opened for a large seed mussel fishery was exceptional. The seed was dense and it covered a much more extensive area than normal. That was the only year they can remember there being many starfish
- a seed fishery was authorised in 2003 – by the time it was fished it had grown to size – it can grow extremely quickly during the summer
- the upper northern end of the bed does not normally get many starfish – there is too much freshwater
- the fishery has learned a great deal over the years about how best to prosecute the resource. In the past scallop dredges were used and mussel was left on the slip at Maryport for 3 days (being covered and uncovered by the tide) in the summer. This led to a lot of mussel perishing.
- technical measures have been brought in over the years and agreed on – these are in the conditions issued with the authorisations – use of single dredge etc
- fishing shouldn't occur on spring tides to ensure that any dislodged mussel is not washed away
- best to fish it autumn and winter – not during the summer months
- it was last fished in 2010-11 – for size mussel which goes for relaying as part-grown stock
- in 2013 there was no mussel in the channel due to sand inundation in the area
- shrimps feed off the small mussel and leaving the seed is therefore seen as important to the shrimp fishery
- as the NWIFCA cannot restrict the numbers of authorisations issued general concern is that if larger boats come in to fishery it will only last a day or two
- fishermen in the room said that they would fish for either seed or size dependant on the decision of the NWIFCA. However, size was more lucrative.
- fishermen in the room agreed that if a seed mussel fishery were considered the best management option is it should be fished by vessels under existing length and engine size byelaw and then sold to others who might require it for their lays – this would help the local economy
- the NWIFCA could issue a CSFC Byelaw 2 to John Watson for scientific work – with science and enforcement officers on board to assess the stock

Recommendation agreed by all NWIFCA Officers and Members present – to work with Silloth mussel men and issue a Byelaw 2 derogation to John Watson to carry out a stock assessment as soon as possible – ie. week beginning 18th August. Science and Enforcement officers would be present and Solway Protector would observe.

Mandy Knott

Senior Scientist

12th August 2014

