

Meeting Note

North Morecambe Bay Public Meeting

Proposed NWIFCA Byelaw 6: Protection of European Marine Site Features

6:45pm, 30th July 2013, Barrow Nautical Club

Attendance:

A. Leadbeater, M. Knott & A. Lindop (NWIFCA Science Officers), I. Dixon (NWIFCA IFCO for area)

H. Ake & R. Crundwell (Natural England)

18 members of the public including representation from:

Barrow Borough Council

Walney Marine Club

Friends of Walney

Sea Sports

Roa Island Boat Club

Barrow Fishermen's Association

Furness Wildfowlers

Furness Fishing Association, Beach Section

Walney Island Wildfowlers

The meeting began with a presentation explaining Defra's revised approach to fisheries management in England and the phased approach to assessment. It then went on to explain how this translated to the NWIFCA byelaw and in particular N Morecambe Bay.

Discussion was heated at first, with one gentleman leaving the meeting before the presentation was finished.

There was some confusion between this byelaw and the MCZ process. It was clear that there was little general knowledge about the revised approach to fisheries management in EMS. It was explained that the revised approach applied to EMSs that were already designated and was completely separate to the MCZ process.

The NWIFCA explained that although the wording of the byelaw was more or less final, there was still time to change the position of the closed areas following stakeholder feedback.

There was concern that access to the closed areas would be completely restricted. The NWIFCA reassured that this was not the case. Vehicular access in these areas could only be prohibited if it

was directly related to fishing activity, NOT other recreational activities (e.g. wildfowling, access to boats).

Other activities such as the placing of moorings are also not restricted by this byelaw. However, other procedures and consents from landowners, Natural England etc. may be required in SSSI sites.

Roa Island Boat Club (RIBC) pointed out that they were the land owners in part of the area enclosed by the line B,C,F. They enquired if the NWIFCA was able to enforce this byelaw on their land. NWIFCA and Natural England will seek an answer to this issue from Defra.

It was also suggested that a meeting with the RIBC committee may be useful.

There was also concern that other activity such as construction of pipelines and capital dredging would have a greater damaging effect on the features. NWIFCA explained that they had no influence on these activities. Natural England noted that any activity taking place in an EMS would undergo assessment of its impact. However, there is a clause for overriding public interest, for projects such as energy.

Activity in proposed closed areas:

Recreational shrimp and other trawls occur along the southern edge of the Walney Channel (E-D). NWIFCA suggested that the buffer zone could be decreased in this area. This will be taken to NE for comment.

Some crab bait collection activity occurs in the vicinity of the line B-C. This boundary can be changed to remove this from the closed area, but still encompass the current recommended buffer zone.

A small amount of private bait digging also occurs in the areas bounded by B,C,F.

Comments on data:

There was a suggestion that the cobble and boulder reef in the Walney Channel would have been damaged or moved by recent dredging activities in the channel. NWIFCA will contact ABP Ports to obtain tracks for dredge activity.

The data for seagrass in the area bounded by B,C,F is from 1999 and therefore may be out of date. It was suggested that the extent of seagrass in this area is confined to the upper part of the bay. Boat Club members that have used moorings there for 50 years reported never seeing seagrass in the areas marked. Natural England will be undertaking seagrass surveys in this area in August 2013. This data can then feed into the byelaw.

Future work:

NWIFCA explained that all amber interactions would be assessed by the end of 2016. These assessments would take into account the intensity of the activity. Only if the assessment showed damage to the feature would management be required.

Questions were asked about the distinction between commercial and recreational fishing activity. In Defra's revised approach only commercial fishing activity is required to be assessed and managed. However, the NWIFCA has decided to prohibit all bait collection activities due to issues with enforcement and distinguishing commercial from recreational activity in the field. The authority had not discussed commercial vs recreational bottom towed gear activity. This will be taken to the authority for discussion.

It was suggested that the Byelaw should have a stipulated period, after which the data and the byelaw would be reviewed and changed if required. The NIWFCA will look into this to see if this can be incorporated into the byelaw.

It was felt by many that that meeting was not well enough advertised and that too little notice was given. It was suggested that it would be beneficial to hold another meeting in order to canvass a wider range of opinions.

A. Leadbeater (NWIFCA Science Officer)