

## **West Kirby Mussel Bed – Extension of Permits to fish for Undersize Mussel**

Requests have been received from the industry to extend the authorisation period of the undersize mussel fishery at West Kirby. Due to several limitations including weather, there will potentially still be large levels of stock remaining when the authorisation runs out on the 29<sup>th</sup> February 2012.

### **Background**

A reported 70 tonnes had been removed from the bed by Monday 7<sup>th</sup> February 2012, approximately one third of the estimated tonnage at the start of January. Due to the classification of the mussel bed (currently a C classification) the mussels must either be heat treated using an approved EU method or relayed in an approved area for several months. It is known that these mussels have been taken for both relaying as well as going directly for processing.

The Authority received several enquiries from interested buyers and gatherers concerning the Chinese Mitten Crab and potential implications of introducing it to a new area in the course of relaying the mussel. Requests were made for the Authority and CEFAS to confirm that there were no Chinese Mitten Crabs (CMC) present on the bed as there was concerns that the transportation of CMC to areas where they are currently unknown maybe a criminal offence.

### Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 - Section 14

(1) Subject to the provisions of this Part, if any person releases or allows to escape into the wild any animal which—

- (a) is of a kind which is not ordinarily resident in and is not a regular visitor to Great Britain in a wild state; or
- (b) is included in Part I of Schedule 9,

he shall be guilty of an offence.

CMC is not listed in Schedule 9 but is classed as a non -native within the United Kingdom.

### **Legislation**

Currently there is no specific legislation which imposes any requirement for the IFCA to manage the fishery taking non-natives/invasive species into account. The UK is however signed up to the Convention on Biological Diversity and DEFRA is currently working on a strategy which will help reduce the spread and increase the eradication of relevant species. Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 the Secretary of State can put into place Codes of Practice for relevant species. There is currently no such document for CMC. However the NWIFCA has taken precautionary steps as part of the management of the fishery and have been liaising with relevant bodies in regards to invasive species throughout.

### **Natural England Recommendations**

No Chinese Mitten Crab was seen during the survey completed on 6<sup>TH</sup> January 2012. Natural England advised us that we should consider there to be a low risk of presence of CMC during January and

February. They advise certain measures to reduce the chance of transference where possible, as outlined in the main report, which the NWIFCA duly out in place.

Natural England have been consulted on the extension of the authorisation until the end of the Dee's current open season for size mussel which closes at the end of April. They have advised us that there would be an increased risk of presence of the CMC in March. This is due to the increase in risk of larval forms of the crab, and risk of adults at medium (see table below). The risk increases further in April as the weather and water warms up increasing the likelihood of spawning and the presence of all three life stages. The females move into deeper water over winter to guard eggs and will then release them in spring. The larvae develop into juvenile forms with 6-7 weeks which will then migrate back up into the river systems.

Life stages	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Larval	X	X	L	H	H	H	H	L	X	X	X	X
Juvenile	L	L	L	H	H	H	H	H	M	L	L	L
Adult	M	M	M	L	X	X	X	X	L	M	H	H

H = High risk, M = medium risk, L = Low risk, X = no risk

Source: 'Consideration of risks involved with the removal of mussel seed from the Salisbury Bank, Dee Estuary that may contain the non-native Chinese Mitten Crab *Eriocheir sinensis*'. CCW. (2011).

## Recommendations

- 1) To extend the Authorisation of the undersize mussel permits until the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012 following a satisfactory repeat survey for CMC at the end of February.
- 2) For the NWIFCA to gain clarification on its legal requirements toward non-native invasive species and to develop its view on non-natives in relation to fisheries management.