

## **DEE MUSSEL FISHERY**

### **Background**

1. At the end of November 2011 a request to take undersize mussel from the West Kirby Mussel bed was received. Officers consulted with a selection of NWIFCA officers, stakeholders and appropriate authorities to develop a management plan of the mussel bed.
2. The mussel bed is known to be an ephemeral bed as the area predominately was a cockle bed, with the mussels settling on dead cockle and shell. This has occurred over the last 20 years 4 times. The bed was surveyed in December 2011 to establish the location and extent of the current bed. Samples of the mussels were taken to assess length structure of population.
3. A permit scheme was devised to allow hand gathering of the mussel from the West Kirby bed for approx 6 weeks from 16<sup>th</sup> January – 29<sup>th</sup> February 2012. Applicants were required to provide certificates of approved training courses by Seafish to help improve health and safety as boats were to be used to access the fishery.
4. A full paper providing full background details was tabled on the 6<sup>th</sup> December 2011 at the IFCA Committee Meeting, Morecambe Town Hall.

### **Bio-Security Concerns and Chinese Mitten Crab**

5. During the engagement with stakeholders concerns over bio security were raised by several authorities, in particular where the undersize mussel was going to be relayed in other areas rather than processed directly.
6. The Environment Agency (EA) has records of 6 confirmed sightings of the crabs within the Dee Estuary and the river over the last 4 years. During last summer, the EA completed the following

### **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***

7. Officers consulted with Natural England regarding the implications of the fishery regarding the risk of introducing Chinese Mitten Crab. The IFCA agreed to aid in mitigating likelihood of transference by the following measures –
  - As advised by Natural England, the risk of Chinese Mitten crab being present in the Dee Estuary during the months of January and February is deemed to have the following levels of risk for the 3 life cycle stages: **Adults – Medium risk, Juveniles – Low risk and Larvae – No Risk** (CCW Report - Chinese Mitten Crabs Risk Assessment in the Dee Estuary (CCW, 2011)). The risk of Chinese Mitten Crab being present in larval form increases to Low risk in March and as such we were **advised to**

**only allow fishing in January and February.** The authorisations to take undersize mussel are valid only until 29<sup>th</sup> February 2012.

- Due to the medium risk of the presence of adult Chinese Mitten Crab during January and February, an intertidal visual survey for adult Chinese Mitten Crab was conducted immediately prior to authorising the fishery. This survey was carried out by a Scientist from The Marine Institute, Galway, Ireland supported by industry operators, representatives from the NWIFCA and Natural England on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2012. The survey coverage of the mussel bed and the scoured out mud was extensive and **no Chinese Mitten Crab were found.** Samples of mussels were also taken and scrutinised in December 2011 to look for Juveniles - **no Adult or Juvenile crabs were found.**
- Part of the conditions of the permit to fish for undersize mussel given by the IFCA is for the hand-gatherers to **visually screen harvested mussels for Chinese Mitten Crab**, and that any found should be removed, destroyed and reported to the NWIFCA immediately. Permit holders have been issued with ID guides for the Crabs. The hand gathers are also required to make sure that **bags of mussels are thoroughly washed on site** to clean the bags of as much mud and other detritus as possible before transporting away from the estuary.

### **Fishing Activity**

8. The activity on the bed so far has been extremely low level, this is alleged to be due to the concerns over the transference of the Chinese Mitten Crab, preventing some buyers/gathers from being able to sell/transport to other areas the mussel for relaying rather than going straight for processing.
9. IFCA has received requests from the industry to extend the authorisation period to allow for stocks to be fished further for those with a market directly to processing. Officers will provide further papers for the meeting if required following further monitoring of the fishery and consultation with relevant authorities.

**Science Officer**  
**31<sup>st</sup> January 2012**