

# NWIFCA Quarterly Meeting

## 20 September 2013: 11.00 a.m.

**AGENDA  
ITEM NO.  
12**

### SCIENCE REPORT 25<sup>TH</sup> MAY – 30<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST 2013

#### GENERAL

1. The science team has been heavily committed to work arising from the Defra priority to implement protection for European Marine Site (EMS) features under IFCA byelaws. This has required field work, extensive data collation mainly from Natural England, GIS mapping, discussion of site boundaries, stakeholder consultation, preparation and drafting of the byelaw and its impact assessment. The team has also contributed to national discussions and liaison meetings. As site data and advice from both the project and Natural England has developed, the sites to be protected in the Byelaw have gone through a series of very time consuming iterations and refinements.
2. It is fortunate that low shellfish stocks throughout the District have led to a reduced requirement for extensive field survey than in recent years so that the EMS work could be achieved in time and remains within the timescale set by Defra.
3. Alongside the EMS project there has been work on some other projects and various consultation responses prepared. All of these are detailed in the report below.
4. At the end of August Alasdair Lindop left his position of Science and Communications officer. The communications aspect of his role, which is a half time post including stakeholder engagement, newsletter, TSB facilitation, press and website management will be undertaken on a part-time basis by IFCO Joe Moulton.
5. The science team has one other vacancy and interviews for a replacement officer will be held in September 2013.

#### SURVEY AND FISHERIES WORK: COCKLES

6. **Foulnaze Cockle Survey.** A survey of the cockle stocks on Foulnaze Bank was carried out on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2013 to inform the potential for a summer fishery in 2013. Results indicated a sizable stock (approx. 550 tonnes) of large cockle all of 2010 year class. No spat settlement was observed. A Habitats Assessment (HRA) for the opening of the fishery was prepared in liaison with Natural England. This assessment provided consent for removal of all the 2010 year class of cockles from Foulnaze on the basis that following spawning in 2013; these cockles are most unlikely to survive another winter.
7. **Foulnaze Fishery planning and monitoring.** Science officers facilitated the planning of the opening of the Foulnaze bank fishery in July and have attended some of the multi-agency debriefing meetings chaired by NWIFCA after each week of fishing. Science officers have also assisted with enforcement when required. The fishery has operated very successfully under very similar arrangements to those developed and implemented in summer 2012.
8. At the start of the fishery in July, around 100 fishermen per day were catching 200 - 300 kg per person per day and the price was high at around £2 per kilo. By the time of writing (6

September), the numbers of fishermen had declined to 20-30 per day and the catch to 100-150kg per person per day.

9. The fishery can continue until the end of October when winter restrictions on the use of small boats come into force. However, it is not yet clear if the fishery will remain economic throughout September and October. The costs of keeping transport vessels available may force an early closure of the fishery.
10. Observations of a 2013 cockle spat settlement on Foulnaze bank were reported by IFCOs on enforcement duty. If possible, once the fishery has closed, the science team will attempt to survey both any remaining stock of 2010 cockles and 2013 spat before the winter.
11. **Ribble North Run cockle bed.** Following the settlement in 2012, The North Run cockle bed at Lytham was surveyed on 15<sup>th</sup> July, with assistance scientists from the Wildlife Trust Marine Graduates scheme. The survey revealed very few cockles with no indication of a 2013 spat settlement. This confirms observations reported from other Ribble estuary cockle beds, including Foulnaze that the substantial settlement seen in 2012 has not survived the winter.
12. **Other cockle beds.** There has been no reported development of any other cockle beds in the District. The local IFCOs report to the Science Team regularly whether or not any settlement has been observed on the other beds and if so full surveys are implemented. To date no settlement has been reported.
13. **Management closure of all cockle beds in the District from 1 September.** Wirral, Ribble, Morecambe Bay and Duddon cockle beds have all been closed because stocks are so low. Science Officers assisted with the preparation of closure notices for all the cockle beds from 1 September following the end of the closed season. Only the Foulnaze Bank bed has been re-opened under byelaw 13A to permit that particular fishery to continue.

## **MORECAMBE BAY MUSSEL BEDS**

14. **Heysham Flat.** Inspections of the seed mussel stocks at Heysham Skear were carried out in July and August. The seed was observed to be in an extremely unstable and scouring condition prior to the opening of the hand gathered fishery on 27<sup>th</sup> August. As in previous years an HRA was written for this ephemeral stock and agreed with Natural England. Science Officers also coordinated multi agency communications. The fishery was opened under the same conditions as previous years with activity limited to weekday, daylight hours; access via a prescribed route from the Battery Car Park and an area of *Sabellaria alveolata* reef protected from fishing activity.
15. There were requests from the industry to allow landing of mussel to transport vessels instead of movement to shore by ATV. This was due to a limited number of ATV licences being available from Lancashire City Council. This option was not followed up at the time of opening as Officers considered the opening of the fishery to be a priority and changing management conditions would delay this. These options could be investigated further in the future.
15. *Sabellaria alveolata* and mussel inspections carried out with the Marine Graduates revealed the changing landscape of the skear this summer. In June seed mussel had begun to settle on the *Sabellaria alveolata* reef and by August this was completely covered in seed mussel and mussel mud. In fact, a mussel survey planned in August became an inspection due to the heavy nature of the settlement. However, it is highly likely that after seed mussel has washed away during the winter the *Sabellaria* will recover, as seen in previous years, providing further evidence of the cyclic nature of this reef feature.

16. **South America seed mussel** Surveys of this stock were carried out in 2013 via helicopter and hovercraft courtesy of the industry and by NWIFCA Barrow based inshore patrol vessel.
17. After discussion with the industry and completion of an HRA, derogations to dredge the seed mussel were issued to 7 operators and the fishery opened on 12<sup>th</sup> August. Science Officers, with assistance from the industry, facilitated Natural England and RSPB representatives observing the dredge seed fishery in action.
18. This year a charge was introduced in agreement with the industry based on proposals under the Morecambe Bay Fishery Order Management Plan and based on vessel length.
19. Conditions were placed on the derogation defining the area to be fished, the specific neap tides which could be fished and limiting activity to 3 hours before and after high water to reduce risk of damage to the underlying habitat. Vessels were also required to keep their AIS receiver switched on while fishing so that IFCOs could monitor location and fishing activity. The fishery continues and to date just under 8000 tonnes of seed mussel have been fished.
20. The increased interest in the fishery from 2 to 6 vessels has made enforcement much more important than in previous years. There have been a lot more complaints than usual about vessels fishing outside the authorised area, outside the authorised times and with vessel monitoring turned off. Officers are continuing to investigate these complaints in collaboration with the Irish Sea Fish Protection Agency (SFPA) and the Northern Irish Department of Agriculture, and Rural Development (DARD).
21. **Walney channel mussel relaying trial.** A derogation was issued to Deepdock Ltd in July to dredge for mussel in the area known as Barrow 1 in the southern Walney Channel. Seed mussel from the South America bed had been laid in this area in 2011 as part of a trial of the area for its potential as a mussel growing site. As part of the derogation the operator is required to provide a report and data on the results and success of this trial. To date no activity has taken place. Officers have requested due notice so that an explanatory note can be put up on the NWIFCA website.

### **Clam Hand Gathering at Leasowe**

22. Officers have been made aware of the substantial amount of recreational hand gathering of Razor Clam and other clam species occurring on certain tides at Leasowe on the Wirral. An Officer attended an enforcement exercise on the beach and collected samples of the catch for identification. Currently there are no regulations or management measures in place for this fishery, aside from Minimum Landing Size for certain species. All of the razor clams harvested that IFCOs have inspected have been over MLS.

## **PROJECT WORK**

### **EUROPEAN MARINE SITES – REVIEW OF FISHERIES MANAGEMENT**

23. Work has continued on the review of fishing activities in our District's European Marine Sites. This work has been focused on preparation of the NWIFCA Byelaw 6 and the protection of "Red Risk" features (see agenda item 7). Since the June Authority meeting this Byelaw has been developed with input from many sources including the TSB, Natural England, MMO, Nature Conservation NGOs, fishermen and the general public. Stakeholder consultation has been specifically targeted at those who are most likely to be directly affected by the proposed byelaw (see communications report).
24. Officers have also been involved in regular national level telephone meetings and a teleconference to discuss cross border working and the approach taken by Welsh Government

to this challenge. The Senior Science Officer attended a meeting with the MMO and Natural England to draft an HRA template, sharing knowledge acquired while completing this type of assessment. An Officer attended a 1.5 day workshop on the process in London attended by IFCAs, MMO, Natural England, JNCC, EA and other relevant bodies. Topics discussed included issues arising from the “Red Risk” byelaw making process and the next steps in the amber assessment process.

25. After the signing of the NWIFCA Byelaw 6, work will continue to publicise the formal public consultation. Focus will then shift to the mammoth task of assessment of the amber and green feature/gear combinations, to be completed by the end of 2016. This will begin with a district wide review of fishing activity occurring in EMSs.

## **SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES REVIEW**

26. The **Project Inshore** stage 2 report completes a sustainability map of England’s 450+ inshore fisheries. Over the past 12 months Project Inshore, led by Seafish, has examined over 450 English Inshore fisheries using the Marine Stewardship Council’s (MSC) sustainability standard as a common benchmark to map the stock, environmental and management status. A summary of the report is now available to be followed by a searchable database to aid fishery managers. Project Inshore stage 3 aim is to develop bespoke strategic sustainability reviews for each English Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority.
27. The Senior Scientist attended a meeting in June with Prof Frid and Sophia Kochalski, the Liverpool University Sustainability studentship post holder. Work to date was reviewed and plans made for the next stage. Officers have worked to provide Sophia with the opportunities to access cockle beds and meet Byelaw 3 permit holders.

## **MORECAMBE BAY HYBRID FISHERY ORDER**

28. A new draft of the Order is awaited from Defra taking in to account the comments of the NWIFCA and other parties.
29. The Senior Scientist met with Boughton Estates agent and Natural England in order to establish areas of common ground in furtherance of the application for the Fishery Order.

## **WILDLIFE TRUST MARINE GRADUATES SCHEME**

30. The 2013-2014 group of Marine Graduates started their training program at the beginning of June. The Senior Science Officer attended the Cumbria Wildlife Trust offices in Kendal to deliver a day of training for the Graduates on the NWIFCA, our work and issues in the district as well as survey techniques.
31. Instructed by Science Officers the Graduates carried out the annual *Sabellaria alveolata* survey on Heysham Flat to assist in the upkeep of this long term data set, a cockle survey at Lytham and a mussel inspection at Heysham Flat.

## **MEDIN**

32. MEDIN is a UK national project which is facilitating the sharing of marine data. Public bodies such as IFCAs have an obligation under European law to make their data available publically and a series of deadlines have been set to ensure that availability is achieved. An Officer attended a half day workshop for IFCAs on MEDIN on 20<sup>th</sup> June in London. This workshop highlighted the next set of deadlines to be met for this project. By 31<sup>st</sup> Dec 2013 all new data collected by IFCAs must have a Metadata record. Officers are confident that due to the similar nature of NWIFCA survey activity in the District this deadline can be met.

## **RAZOR CLAM FISHERY DEVELOPMENT**

33. The NWIFCA has been actively involved in the planning of the Cefas Fisheries Science Partnership fund project entitled “Sustainable Razor Clam Fishery”. After a letter from the Chairman highlighting the concerns of the Committee about their lack of initial input a teleconference between Officers, the Chairman and Cefas staff was held. This allowed these concerns to be aired and a future plan for engagement was made. A further meeting of a Committee subgroup was held and Officers liaised with Cefas in project development.
34. A final planning meeting with the subgroup and Dave Palmer (the Cefas Project Lead) was held on 8<sup>th</sup> August. Mr Palmer discussed plans for the project. The project primarily will undertake to develop an electro dredge gear that is commercially viable. Instead of digging into the sediment an electrical pulse excites the Razor Clams out of their burrows for collection, limiting the impact on the sediment. Although primarily a gear development project data will also be collected on impacts on target and non-target species.
35. It is expected that the data collection for this project will occur this autumn. Officers are currently waiting for a HRA assessment before a scientific derogation can be made.

## **AUTHORISATIONS AND CONSULTATIONS**

36. NWIFCA has responded to the following policy and consent consultations
  - I. Workington River Bank Protection
  - II. Eskmeals Wall Reproofing
  - III. Meols Water Treatment Works
  - IV. Mersey Gateway - Runcorn Bridge
  - V. Heysham Power Station repairs to Outfall
  - VI. Catchment to Coast NERC Tracer Study
  - VII. Sunderland Point Coastal Protection
  - VIII. Warrington Rail Bridge Scour Protection

## **MEETINGS, WORKSHOPS AND COURSES**

37. Science officers attended events as follows
  - I. Foulney Mussel Fishery Stakeholders Meeting
  - II. Barrow Wildlife and Heritage Committee Meeting
  - III. TAG – national IFCA Technical Advisory group
  - IV. MEDIN Workshop
  - V. HRA Template Workshop
  - VI. Fisheries in EMS Review Workshop
  - VII. TSB Meeting – 16<sup>th</sup> August.
  - VIII. URBANE WORKSHOP – EA offices Bristol – How the design of sea-defenses can be used to increase biodiversity

## **COMMUNICATIONS**

38. A stakeholder meeting was held on Walney Island to disseminate information and gather feedback on the proposed closed areas for the Morecambe Bay seagrass and Walney Channel boulder and cobble reef.
39. A meeting was also held with fishermen in Barrow in regard to the review of NWIFCA netting byelaws.

## **Text Service**

- 40 The main communication development this quarter has been the implementation of the Text Alert system. It has been particularly useful in the management of the Foulnaze fishery, and several messages have been sent over the last month, such as informing permit holders of the status of their boat-endorsement, giving details of the tide openings and reminding fishermen about renewals. The system has been very well received by fishermen on the ground and seems to be proving itself as a very effective method of communication.

**Science Officers and CEO**  
**6 September 2013**