

NWIFCA Quarterly Meeting: 18th September 2020: 11.00 a.m.

**AGENDA
ITEM NO.
10**

SCIENCE QUARTERLY REPORT 30th APRIL - 9th AUGUST 2020

REPORT FOR INFORMATION

Purpose: To provide an update on work carried out in the last quarter;

Recommendation: Members approve the report.

INTRODUCTION

1. The quarter has been busy with survey and inspection. No boat work has been possible largely due to virus restrictions preventing working at close quarters. Two scheduled mussel inspections using a RIB to access beds in north Morecambe Bay had to be aborted due to storms. This has hindered collection of further evidence regarding the subtidal mussel in the Solway. The vacancy within the team still stands due to difficulties in training a new recruit with virus restrictions in place.

FISHERIES - BIVALVES

2. A full report was provided to TSB for the meeting on 11 August presenting survey results up to 25th July and published on the website.
3. **COCKLES:** Following presentation of stock assessment results, approval was given to the opening of the following cockle beds in Morecambe Bay, subject to HRA: Newbiggin, Leven Sands, Flookburgh and Pilling Sands on 1st September and Aldingham, once shellfish hygiene classification had been established (requiring sampling). All other cockle beds within the District will remain closed under NWSFC Byelaw 13a and CSFC Byelaw 18 due to low stocks.
4. **MUSSELS:** TSB called an Extraordinary Meeting on 4th August to decide on management of the seed mussel resource on South America Skear. At that meeting TSB approved dividing the resource spatially between hand-gathering and dredge sectors, subject to HRA. The fishery would be reviewed following a month of fishing. Hand-gatherers said mussel would persist and grow through to size and was not ephemeral.
5. The fishery was opened on 20th August to hand-gatherers and 24th August to those with dredge permits. All authorisation set to expire on 18th September. It is understood that no hand-gathering has occurred. North Morecambe Bay hand gatherers want and expect it to grow on and not be washed away. No other gatherers have shown interest. One dredge vessel fished the authorised areas for 3 hours removing 5 tonnes, which is an extremely low amount for that period of fishing,
6. An inspection was made by officers on 23rd August, ie. prior to dredge fishing beginning, a report of which is provided below. As a result of this inspection it could be seen that large

swathes of mussel had already been lost through washing out in storms. Some hard ground was uncovered as the mud had also eroded. Subsequently the permitted dredge area was reduced to ensure the fishery remained Habitats Regulations compliant.

7. Hand-gatherers continue to maintain that much of the remaining seed will persist and grow to size. This will be monitored where possible however, with large areas already lost it appears NWIFCA officers were correct in expecting the seed to be ephemeral and washed away as it has been in almost all years when in the condition observed in July.
8. Management of this fishery this year has been difficult as conflicting opinions on the potential future of the stock have sharpened. Time lost in reaching a decision to allow dredge fishing may well have resulted in the loss of a fishable stock. This dispute has occurred for over 40 years and was a prime reason for establishing the Bivalve Mollusc Working Group (BMWG) BMWG has sometimes been successful in bringing sectors together and reaching agreement. However this year BMWG meetings dissolved into disarray with no agreement being possible. TSB have requested that the Morecambe Bay Mussel Management Plan be revisited with the intention of finding an agreeable way forward. If possible a report will be provided for the November TSB.
9. Heysham Flat was opened as a seed mussel fishery on 3rd August with an Exclusion Zone marked out on the beach to protect the live *Sabellaria alveolata* as usual. No fishing has taken place at Heysham.
10. **LEASOWE CLAMS.** Survey of widely dispersed clams at Leasowe is difficult without excavating large areas of beach which is not feasible. The Science Team is developing a survey and stock assessment strategy to provide the evidence which the Authority needs to recommend future management. This will be trialed over future months in assessments of stocks of clam at Leasowe targeting the large *Lutraria lutraria* (otter clam) and *Mya arenaria* (sand gaper).
11. It must be acknowledged that current density levels and species abundance may have been reduced by the high levels of gathering that has occurred over recent months, and therefore results will reflect this. A report will be presented to November TSB.

NWIFCA PROJECTS

12. NWIFCA MPA Monitoring and Control Plan The rolling programme of review of HRAs for all activities in all sites continues to ensure if any significant change occurs the HRAs are still fit for purpose and management is appropriate.
13. Razor Clam collaborative research: Bangor University Shellfish Centre electro-dredge study - due to covid restrictions all work was put on hold. Although it could be possible for surveys to now start it is understood the vessel is busy involved in other fisheries during the summer.
14. Whelk Fisheries in the North West – samples for size of maturity (SOM) study continue to be supplied by Cumbrian fishers and Science Officers are able to collect and process them at the lab observing safe distancing.
15. Other projects are on hold until covid restrictions are lifted.

IFCA TECHNICAL ADVISORY GROUP (TAG) MEETING JULY 2020 HELD ON LINE

16. Ms Knott was re-elected as Vice Chair of the national IFCA Technical Advisory Group for a further year. Colin Trundle Cornwall IFCA stood down as Chairman after 18 months service and was replaced by Tim Smith NEIFCA.
17. The incoming Chief Executive of the AIFCA Robert Clark outlined his thinking on ways forward for the Association and IFCAs. Rob was the inaugural chair of TAG and has a commitment to IFCA science and research. He takes up his AIFCA post on 1st September;
18. SIAG (Shellfish Industry Advisory Group) is a group comprised of Seafish, DEFRA, NFFO and others. They currently have 2 sub-groups for whelk and crustacea and are looking to develop an overarching management plan for UK crab. TAG has representation on this group;
19. IFCA Science Officer training – TAG reviewed the IFCO level I course to use as a basis for IFCA science and research officers, but found that much of it would need development to meet science officer needs particularly on environmental legislation and status. IFCA training officer Ian Jones has now moved to be Southern IFCA Chief Officer and so the future of the IFCA training programme is uncertain.
20. TAG members shared experiences of the impact of the virus and restrictions on research and monitoring work and long term monitoring programmes.

Partner programmes

21. **HIGHLY PROTECTED MARINE AREAS (HPMA)** In June Defra published the 'Benyon Review into HPMA' which was circulated to members and is on the Defra website. HPMA are sites where all extractive activity including all types of fishing may be prohibited. The review assessed the evidence for the need for HPMA in inshore and offshore English waters and offshore Northern Irish waters. The review concluded that: "there is such a need and that the substantial benefits of HPMA's justify the negative effects."
22. There was concern around Morecambe Bay as it was a Suggested Site in a list at the back of the report and the only area mentioned within the NWIFCA District. However the sites listed are merely sites suggested in the Call for Evidence and is not endorsed by the Panel. The Government has indicated that it will respond to the report but no timescale is given but it has said that no sites are expected in UK waters within 3 years.
23. **NATIONAL WHELK WORKING GROUP:** Dr Hartley attended the national Whelk Working Group meeting via Skype in June: the group continues to work through the extensive work plan although much of the practical research has been halted due to Covid-19.
24. **ST BEES VOLUNTARY CODE OF PRACTICE FOR NETTING 16TH MARCH - 24TH JULY:** Officers implemented the St Bees Voluntary Netting Closure on 16th March and the area has been monitored for compliance by IFCOs. As in previous years it is pleasing to report full support and compliance from netters. The closure was removed on 24th July, the time when the breeding birds and fledglings have left the area.
25. **MMO NORTH WEST MARINE PLAN:** Following the consultation on the draft North West Marine Plan MMO have published their draft consultation report provided as Annex A.
26. **PLANNING REFORM:** Government are consulting on their plans to reform planning law in England. The consultation runs until the 29th of October and can be accessed at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/planning-for-the-future>. Although the understanding of officers to planning legislation is limited, proposed reforms to Local Plans seem to be moving away from independent tests of soundness towards a “test of sustainability” in accordance with policy from the Secretary of State. What this policy would be was not outlined in the documentation. The concern of Officers is that the proposed planning reform may move decision making away from local Planning Authorities, and the challenges and sensitivities of our coastline may not be represented sufficiently by national planning policy. Officers are considering a NWIFCA response, but suggest that members should respond individually should they wish to do so. If members want submissions to be recorded by the Authority responses should be copied to science@nw-ifca.gov.uk

27. **FUTURE OF OUR INSHORE FISHERIES:** A conference report recently published by Seafish is attached at Annex B. It summarises the discussions at a multi-sectoral event in October 2019. The Future of Our Inshore Fisheries Steering Group was convened after recognising that management of UK inshore fisheries has been criticised for being overly complex, inconsistent in its approach and ineffective at delivering on long-term sustainability goals. The Group brings together representatives from the UK fishing industry, government, and the research community with a key aim of collaborating to find workable, enduring solutions for the future management of this important resource. Representation at the conference came from inshore fishermen (34.5%), inshore fisheries representatives (18.7%) and regulators (20.1%). The conference included.
- How should we define inshore fisheries?
 - How to successfully deliver co-management in inshore fisheries
 - Spatial conflict & how to avoid it
 - How to provide for access & deliver business certainty
 - Delivering compliance outcomes
 - Enabling industry-led science.
28. **THE ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP ON FISHERIES (APPG):** Members can subscribe to this group on a website at: <https://www.fisheriesappg.org/>. The group is a neutral, cross-party forum for debate, discussion and learning within Parliament founded by MPs and Peers who want to promote and support the UK fishing industry. It aims to explore key questions for the future of fishing, processing, coastal communities and the marine environment. It describes itself as at the forefront of the vital conversations for fishing and associated industries in Parliament, and bringing together best practice and inspirational case studies from across the country in a series of Parliamentary seminars, open to all.
29. **DEFRA BLUE CARBON GROUP:** Dr Hartley attended this new group convened by Defra with other IFCA representatives. Blue Carbon is a term for carbon captured by living organisms in coastal and marine ecosystems, and stored in biomass and sediments. These are ecosystems that are relatively amenable to management, and have high carbon burial rate per unit area, accumulating carbon in soils and sediments. The purpose of the group is to investigate possibilities for protecting and restoring blue carbon habitats as a nature based solution to the impacts of climate change. Considering the wealth of appropriate blue carbon habitats in NWIFCA District, including mudflats, saltmarsh, seagrass and sub-tidal mud, continuing involvement is important and Dr Hartley will report back to members as the work develops.
30. **HALITE WATER EXTRACTION LICENCE - PREESALL GAS STORAGE:** A report has been picked up from Fleetwood MP Cat Smith’s webpage that Halite had lost their water extraction licence from the Environment Agency. The licence was for extracting water from Fleetwood fish dock to wash out the salt caverns at Preesall for the gas storage project. The licence included a condition that stipulated the abstraction must have commenced by 17 July 2020. Halite failed to meet this deadline and instead applied to change this condition and extend the

date to 2023. However, the EA did not receive the information they needed to make their assessment and determine the application before the commencement date. To be able to abstract water from the docks now, Halite will have to make an application for a new licence. A number of changes have been made in the interim to designated nature conservation sites in the locality of the project. The EA have issued a letter to Halite shared with NWIFCA via Brinewatch, a local campaigning group opposed to the Halite development. The letter details EA advice to the company on numerous areas of information that need to be supplied with any future application, and it is clear it will not be a case of just resubmitting the previous application.

31. **TIDAL LAGOON PROPOSAL - MOSTYN DOCKS, DEE ESTUAR:** A newspaper report has come to the attention of Officers of a proposed tidal lagoon at Mostyn Docks, Dee Estuary. This is the first knowledge NWIFCA has of this project although the paper reports that: "Preparatory work, including environmental and ecological studies, has been taking place for four years and the lagoon will be designed to maintain navigational access for shipping". Mostyn SeaPower Ltd want to build a 6.7 kilometre long lagoon on the Welsh side of the Dee with walls standing 2m above sea level. They have "been working with engineering consultants Ban Nuttall from Camberley and environmental experts ABP Mer, from Southampton and the company has already negotiated with the National Grid for the electricity to be used by the nearby Connah's Quay Power Station. The firm is planning to submit an application to the UK Government for a Development Consent Order by the end of 2022 and hopes to get the green light a year later". <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/tidal-lagoon-north-wales-swansea-18521546>

32. **MMO MARINE LICENCE AND OTHER CONSULTATIONS FOR LAST QUARTER:**

Hesketh Out Marsh East Predator Exclusion Area

Marine Licence

Clearance of Seawater Intake at BAE Systems (Barrow)

Marine Licence

Hambleton Flood Alleviation Scheme

Marine Licence

Bramley Moore Dock - The peoples project

Marine Licence

Maryport Aquarium Lobster Hatchery

Byelaw dispensation

Bangor Uni - Saltmarsh landscape effects on fisheries production

Byelaw dispensation

MEETINGS, WORKSHOPS AND TRAINING ATTENDED THIS QUARTER

MASTS webinar series – Scotland's experimental electrofishery for razor clams – developments and progress. Dr Clive Fox.

Byelaw Review meeting

Blue Carbon Group

Whelk Working Group

BMWG x 2

Wyre Estuary Biosecurity Workshop

Good Fish Guide overview and whelk ratings discussion

Science Team

3rd September 2020

South America Mussel Inspection (Quad) 23/08/20
Carried out by Science officers, LW: 09:39 0.8m (Liverpool tides)

The previously mapped area of seed mussel on South America was accessed by quad bike, and a foot inspection carried out.

The inspection followed storm Ellen; the worst of the storm hit on Friday 21st August where Morecambe Bay received strong southwesterly winds.

The storm coincided with large spring tides, a combination which has the potential to severely impact mussel that is already loose and unstable.

From crossing the bed on foot it was clear there had been significant scouring. A visual estimate was that 40-50% of the mussel had been washed away. The impact was patchy with some areas having worse scouring than others. The mussel that persisted was approximately 30mm in length.

Much of the area was dominated by mussel and bare mussel mud. To the southeast of the mussel the mussel mud had also been scoured leaving areas of hard substrate. Where the mussel persisted it was no longer on a deep layer of mud but instead on a thin layer (only a few centimetres) of sandy mud. The scouring had also revealed the smothered dead *Sabellaria alveolata* as previously reported, showing the depth of mud which had been washed away.



Fig 1 – Area of scoured mussel 23-08-20



Fig 2 – Area of scoured mussel 23-08-20

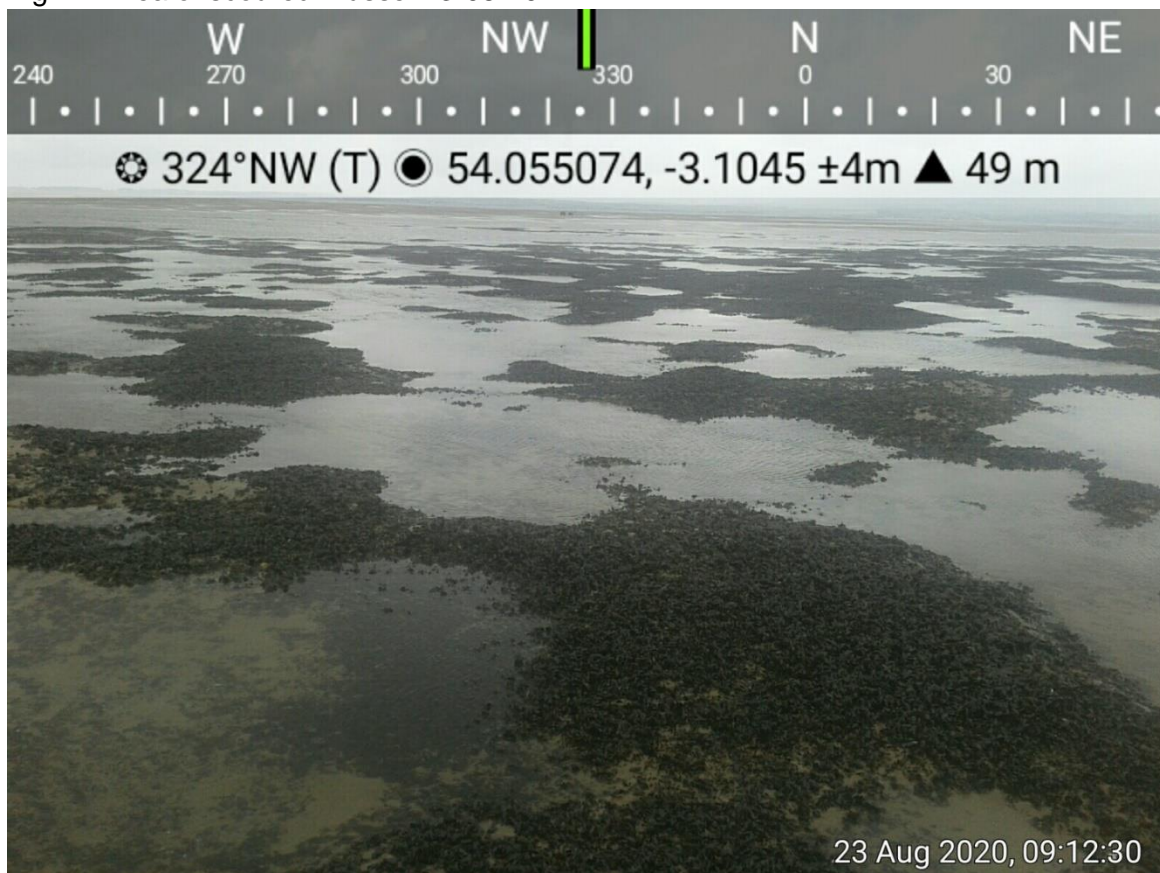


Fig 3 – Area of mussel 23-08-20



Fig 4 – Area of mussel 23-08-20



Fig 5 - Area of scoured mussel 23-08-20



Fig 6 – Area of previously smothered *Sabellaria alveolata* with hard ground exposed in background of image



Fig 7 - Area of scoured mussel 23-08-20



Fig 8 - Area of mussel 23-08-20