

**NWIFCA Authority Meeting:  
10<sup>th</sup> December 2020; 10.00 a.m.**

**AGENDA  
ITEM NO.  
13**

**SCIENCE QUARTERLY REPORT 10<sup>th</sup> AUGUST - 8TH NOVEMBER 2020**  
**FOR INFORMATION**

**Purpose:** i) to provide an update on work carried out in the last quarter;

**Recommendation:** i) Members approve the report.

**1. MARINE PROTECTED AREAS IN THE NWIFCA DISTRICT:**

a) 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.

**2. NWIFCA RESEARCH PROJECTS**

a) Razor Clam collaborative research

A meeting was held between NWIFCA scientists, Bangor University Shellfish Centre scientist and industry to discuss ways forward following the severe delays caused by the pandemic. Work is underway to progress surveys from January 2021, which includes finalising gear specifications, amending the HRA to take into account the change in survey timings, and contacting MMO over extending the dispensation for use of electro-dredge.

b) Whelk Fisheries in the North West

Samples for size of maturity (SOM) study continue to be supplied and are processed and analysed in the Carnforth lab. A concerted effort has been made to catch up on the backlog of samples. An agreement is being drawn up, and dispensation from MMO sought, to purchase samples from a second fisher working in a different area of the District, to increase coverage of the study, with the aim of identifying any spatial variation in SOM.

c) Plastics in mussels

Cumbria University project will re-start with a new student taking over. Mussel samples have continued to be collected and stored and will be provided to get the project up and running again. An invitation has been received for delivery of a further lecture to students in December.

d) Cumbria Wildlife Trust Nephrops Creel Study

A full report was provided to November TSB. CWT has been successful in gaining funding from MMO MFF to conduct phase 2 of a study into the feasibility of a nephrops creel fishery in the northeast Irish Sea, working with industry. NWIFCA officers have been discussing what role NWIFCA might take in this study which is mainly focused in the West of Walney MCZ.

### **3. TAG MEETING - NOVEMBER 2020 held virtually.**

The Senior Scientist in her role as Vice Chair worked with TAG Chair to facilitate the November meeting. Guest speakers included Jean-Luc Solandt from MCS, and Ben Green (EA) who discussed ReMeMaRe (Restore Meadows, Marshes and Reefs) projects restoration tools and mapping, and presented the newly published 'European Native Oyster Habitat Restoration Handbook'. Other topics discussed included:

- AIFCA's view on future IFCA work and the Environment Bill
- Data Sharing Agreement with MMO
- Ghost Fishing and net recycling projects
- EA monitoring programme 2020-21.

### **4. NATIONAL WHELK WORKING GROUP**

A further meeting was held virtually in August of this multi-agency / multi-area group. Both Cefas and Welsh Government are working towards developing whelk stock assessment models, Jersey States shared their methodology using Catch Per Unit Effort (CPUE) biomass index as a proxy. Various IFCAs are involved in reviewing their potting byelaws, regional size at maturity research, management options on MLS and closed seasons, and considering the implications and compliance options of different MLS in different areas within the District. The Marine Conservation Society invited submission of information on whelks to inform their Good Fish Guide - UK whelk fisheries generally have very low sustainability scoring. The first Annual Report for 2019-20 is provided as Annex C giving an indication of the work achieved in Year 1 of the group. Collaboration has been agreed with the Seafish led 'Whelk Management Group' (WMG) established under the Shellfish Industry Advisory Group, to share information when appropriate and to have representation from the WMG on the IFCA led Working Group.

### **5. WORKING GROUP FORMED TO DISCUSS GEOLOGICAL DISPOSAL OF RADIOACTIVE WASTE IN CUMBRIA**

The Copeland Working Group has formed to begin the conversation with the community in Copeland to assess if Copeland is the right place to build a Geological Disposal Facility (GDF) for higher activity radioactive waste. This facility would store the UK's existing higher activity radioactive waste that is currently stored above ground, mostly at Sellafield. A GDF would be made up of highly engineered vaults located deep underground (200-1000km) that will be designed to protect the environment and keep the radioactive waste safe and secure while the radioactivity decays naturally to safe levels. A GDF can only be built with the express consent of the community, and there is significant community investment available at various stages of the siting process which is likely to take several years.

Desk based studies have been conducted by Radioactive Waste Management (RWM), part of the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority, to investigate initial areas of interest which include the entire borough of Copeland (excluding the Lake District National Park) and associated inshore seabed up to 22km from the shore. These studies have identified that the borough of Copeland and the associated inshore areas are suitable for potentially siting a GDF, with some security and safety aspects to consider further, such as military training areas, oil and gas exploration zones, mining and existing nuclear facilities.

In the months ahead, the Working Group will work to identify what Government policy calls a 'search area', or areas, within the borough, which will be the areas that could be considered in more detail by a Community Partnership with RWM in future. This will draw upon available information based on a range of factors to help determine which parts of Copeland, outside of the National Park, may have potential to host a GDF. No specific search area has been identified for further investigation at this time, community engagement events are being planned subject to lockdown restrictions.

The Science Team have registered for updates and will keep a watching brief on developments and report back regularly to the Authority.

## **6. MMO MARINE LICENSING STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT MEETING WITH IFCAS**

MMO Marine Licensing Team invited IFCA TAG members to a virtual engagement meeting in order to establish quarterly discussions around areas of interest and concern. The Terms of Reference have been drafted, and IFCAs have supplied MMO with a brief on what kinds of marine license consultations need IFCA response, the capacity of IFCA teams to provide detailed responses, other priority workstreams, in order for MMO to better understand the demands on IFCAs' time when responding to consultation requests. These engagement meetings are very welcome and it is hoped will improve the system in the future.

## **7. WYRE RIVERS TRUST BIOSECURITY PLAN LAUNCH**

Dr Hartley attended the Wyre Rivers Trust biosecurity workshop. The overall aim of the workshop was to discuss biosecurity, invasive non-native species (INNS) pertinent to the Wyre Catchment, and how to stop the spread. Topics covered included promoting information sharing and access to wash down areas. The discussions held during the workshop were intended to contribute to the development of the Wyre Rivers Trust biosecurity plan.

## **8. MORECAMBE BAY PARTNERSHIP**

Officers were delighted to hear that Morecambe Bay Partnership was not only the sole UK finalist in an international competition to banish plastic from our beautiful coastline but on receiving over 8000 votes was successful in their bid to secure funds for the Clear the Bay by Day project.

'Over the past 17 years our dedicated volunteers have removed 47 tonnes of rubbish – that's massive. Yet sadly, in the last few months we are drowning in a wave of discarded masks. Wouldn't it be lovely for Morecambe Bay to win this €30,000 to Clear the Bay by Day'. Further detail can be found here:

<https://www.lancasterguardian.co.uk/news/people/community-campaign-banish-plastic-morecambe-bay-wins-international-funding-competition-3035346>

## **9. THE ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP ON FISHERIES (APPG)**

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on fisheries held an online event on 'Local Decision Making for UK Fisheries'. The IFCAs were represented by Tim Smith of North Eastern IFCA. Tim did an excellent job of representing the IFCAs and raising awareness of our important role. The event can be watched here:

<https://www.fisheriesappg.org/blog/2020/10/1/regional-decision-making-all-our-panelists-answers>

## **10. DEFRA BLUE CARBON GROUP**

Dr Hartley attended the most recent Blue Carbon Working Group. The group is bringing their discussions together into a knowledge exchange paper summarising existing knowledge on Blue Carbon habitats, identifying knowledge gaps and highlighting current research. The paper focusses on kelp, maerl and biogenic reef, a draft of this paper was discussed at the meeting. Biogenic reefs have the greatest uncertainty surrounding whether they are a net source or net sink of carbon (C), due to the release of C during the calcification process. However, the following project is underway as part of the Scottish Blue Carbon Forum looking at Blue Carbon in bivalve shellfish beds.

<https://www.bluecarbon.scot/h-lee>

## **11. MERSEY SEDIMENT MANAGEMENT GROUP**

Dr Hartley attended the Mersey Sediment Management Group meeting. The group had not met in March due to Covid restrictions. The virtual meeting was well attended and included a number of new representatives from a range of organisations including Cefas and RSPB. The presentation from Peel Ports summarised the purpose of the group, potential beneficial use projects, updates on dredging and disposal activity including the use of water injection dredging, and a discussion around updating the Mersey dredge disposal plan. Science officers have contributed fisheries information to a list of potential beneficial use sites, which will be discussed further at the next meeting.

## **12. TIDAL LAGOON PROPOSAL - MOSTYN DOCKS, DEE ESTUARY**

As reported to the September Authority meeting officers have found out about a proposal for a tidal lagoon on the Welsh side of the Dee at Mostyn. Mostyn SeaPower, a subsidiary of The Port of Mostyn, has developed the proposals. A summary of the environmental and planning advice provided by AMPmer can be found here:

<https://www.abpmer.co.uk/experience/advising-north-wales-tidal-energy-lagoon/>

## **13. MERSEY ESTUARY TIDAL BARRAGE ENVIRONMENTAL WORKSHOP**

Dr Hartley and Ms Knott have attended two online environmental workshops convened over the Mersey Estuary Tidal Barrage project. Led by the Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service (MEAS) who have been appointed by the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority to undertake some evidence-based environmental work to support the development of a Mersey Tidal Power project (MTPP), the workshops were designed to:

- provide a brief on the draft Environmental Strategy for the next phase of the project development, including the mapping method for environmental constraints to inform geographical constraints;
- to disseminate and invite feedback on the draft Environmental Stakeholder Plan;
- to identify requirements for data provision for the Mersey Tidal Power Project to Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.

MEAS state that they are advisors, not project advocates and will be using a data-driven and risk-based approach throughout. They are currently establishing the evidence base across the entire study area, totally neutral of locations and technology. They are engaging with environmental stakeholders, guided by their Environmental Stakeholder Plan, to assemble and map the evidence on environmental constraints to inform the next steps of project development.

The workshops were attended by representatives from wide ranging environmental agencies both statutory and non-statutory with knowledge and expertise in the area of potential influence from the proposed barrage. This area stretches from the Ribble Estuary down to north Wales and out in to Liverpool Bay, centering on the Mersey.

More information on the project proposal: <https://www.liverpoolcityregion-ca.gov.uk/metro-mayor-appoints-industry-veteran-to-deliver-mersey-tidal-power-project/>

## **14. WHOLESCAPE APPROACH TO MARINE MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP**

Dr Hartley attended the Wholescape Approach to Marine Management Workshop (WAMM), held online. WAMM is an EMFF funded national initiative lead by the rivers trusts and coastal partnerships, aiming to support a more integrated and collaborative approach to the management of estuarine and coastal waters.

This workshop incorporated the South West (SW) and North West (NW) workshops and consisted of presentations from NW and SW Catchment and Coastal Partnerships, a presentation of the Coastal Data Explorer developed by the project and available online at the Catchment Based Approach (CaBA) website, a presentation of the Morecambe Bay pilot project, and concluded with break out groups to explore collaborative working between catchment and coastal partnerships.

Morecambe Bay has been selected as the primary study area for WAMM and the Morecambe Bay Coastal Partnership and the three CaBA partnerships encompassing the Bay catchment (led by Wyre, Lune and South Cumbria Rivers Trusts) have begun a programme of collaborative projects focussing on plastics and water quality.

More information and the outputs from all regional workshops can be found online.

<https://catchmentbasedapproach.org/learn/wamm/>

## **15. FISHERIES - BIVALVES**

A full report was provided to TSB in November presenting survey results up to 19<sup>th</sup> October and published on the website. Since then surveys have been carried out at Leasowe on the large bivalves, reported elsewhere in December's meeting (NWIFCA Byelaw 2 reports).

### **a) EU Exit and live bivalve mollusc (LBM) exports**

Following the Shellfish Liaison Group meeting in September, Officers raised the on-going issue of problems with export of live bivalve molluscs (LBM) to EU from B and C classified areas post 31<sup>st</sup> December. Byelaw 3 permit holders, buyers and Defra have been contacted directly with concerns. Notably Defra called a meeting with IFCA's and Cefas Fish Health Inspectorate (FHI) to discuss and the issues were laid clear. NWIFCA urged stakeholders to contact Cefas FHI to explain the impacts on their business models in detail.

Unless a change occurs between now and the end of December the position will be that only LBM from class A waters or depurated in the UK will be able to enter the EU between 1<sup>st</sup> January and 21<sup>st</sup> April 2021, due to the new certification not having been put in place. It appears there may have been a lack of understanding of the nature of UK intertidal LBM fisheries and routes to export, and an under-estimation of the costs to industry, and possible loss of markets during that period which could have more long-lasting effects. There are very few class A waters in the UK: most of those in the NWIFCA District are class B, with some C. It is understood that the Impact Assessment costs were based on vessel fished stock.

### **b) MUSSELS**

- i. Chinese Mitten Crab - a full report was presented to TSB in November on confirmatory evidence of adult CMC in Morecambe Bay, and the publicity launched by Officers as a result. The longer term impacts on mussel fisheries are yet to be fully felt.
- ii. Morecambe Bay Mussel Management Plan - Science Officers met with Natural England to discuss areas of work concerning environmental and conservation interest outstanding in the revived Morecambe Bay Mussel Management Plan drafted some years ago and parked. The aim is to fully review this plan and bring to TSB for approval.
- iii. Solway Subtidal Mussel - as previously reported, all of the extensive planned survey work on the subtidal mussel in the Silloth Channel was curtailed, firstly due to the pandemic and in recent months due to poor weather and storms. A report has been

produced on the use of side scan sonar and grab sampling carried out in March, and provided as Annex A.

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

Kings Parade Surface Water Outfall, New Brighton	MMO Marine Licence
IOM ferry terminal - variation request	MMO Marine Licence
Cefas Clean Sea Environmental Monitoring Programme	Dispensation
Port of Mostyn, project Flagstaff: Quarterly Trawl & Inter-tidal surveys and Monthly Ichthyoplankton surveys	Dispensation

**17. MEETINGS, WORKSHOPS AND TRAINING ATTENDED THIS QUARTER**

Morecambe Bay Tidal project - virtual lecture Lancaster University  
Mersey Sediment Stakeholder Group  
Defra meeting re: shellfish exports post EU Exit  
Meeting with Natural England over Morecambe Bay Mussel Management Plan  
Meeting with Cumbria Wildlife Trust over the nephrops creels study  
Wholescape Approach to Marine Management Workshop  
Local Decision Making UK Fishing meeting  
Shellfish Liaison Group Meeting  
NAEMO Advisory Board meeting  
Mersey Tidal Power Environmental Workshops x 2  
Razor Clam Collaborative Research Progress Update meeting  
TAG meeting  
Whelk Working Group meeting

**Science Team**  
**24th November 2020**

