

**NWIFCA Technical, Science and
Byelaw Committee
9th February 2021: 10:00 a.m.**

**AGENDA
ITEM NO.
6**

**SCIENCE REPORT FOR INFORMATION
1ST OCTOBER – 31ST DECEMBER 2020**

Purpose: To provide an update to members on the work of the Science Team in the last quarter and provide an update on staff changes within the Science Team.

Recommendation: Report provided for information.

1. UPDATE ON STAFF CHANGES

Ms Mandy Knott left on 16 December and Dr Melanie Hartley left on 5 January. Ms Mandy Knott left to take up a post in Natural England as a Coastal Lead Advisor. Dr Hartley left to take up a post in Natural England where she will be working on mathematical modelling of marine ecosystems using 'R' stats. This post requires specialist skills which Melanie developed during her doctorate and is keen to advance. The Authority extends congratulations to Mandy and Melanie with sincere thanks for their valuable input to the science work and wishes them great success at Natural England. In December IFCO Elliott Waltho requested a move from enforcement team to science team.

The changes were considered at the Finance and HR Committee in December.

The Committee approved the promotion of Mr Jonathan Haines to Acting Senior Scientist, the move of Mr Waltho to the science team and considered that the post of Senior Scientist should be advertised externally. Preparation of papers is in progress.

Following advertisement and shortlisting, interviews for an Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Advisor officer were held on 19 January. The position has been filled subject to references with a planned start date of 1st March 2021.

The appointment of a forth science post must now await the outcome of a recruitment for the post of Senior Scientist.

The changes are mitigated to some extent as they arose in winter and field work has not yet been affected. The aim is to have a full science team in place and sufficiently trained by the start of the main field work programme in spring.

Unfortunately a great deal of experience and skills have been lost with the departure of Mandy and Melanie. This will take some time to overcome. Controlling impacts on survey work will be a priority. It is expected that involvement in less critical projects will have to be reduced.

In preparation for the departure of two experienced members of staff and the foreseen decrease in the science team work capacity, much of the quarter was spent handing over work, and where possible finishing off work streams. The priorities over the coming months will be:

- Recruitment of the Senior Scientist

- Training new members of staff
- Delivering the survey requirements of the Authority
- Assessing netting within the Solway Firth SPA
- Continuing the SoM whelk work to inform the MCRS
- Assisting with the implementation of the potting byelaw and assessing Whelk Track Record Applications
- Responding to Marine License applications
- Processing byelaw dispensation requests
- Dealing with general science enquires.

2. NWIFCA RESEARCH PROJECTS

a) Razor Clam collaborative research

Bangor University Shellfish Centre electro-dredge study – due to delays in being able to progress the surveying on an industry vessel an extension was sort for the project. An amended HRA was agreed with Natural England and extension to the MMO dispensation was provided until November 2021. Officers await news from the Bangor University scientist on when work aboard industry vessel may be started.

b) Whelk Fisheries in the North West

Samples for size of maturity (SoM) study continue to be supplied and are being processed and analysed in the Carnforth lab.

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.

3. WHELK WORKING GROUP (WWG)

There were no meetings held this quarter. NWIFCA had been collating information on whelk parasites for all members of the WWG. Dr Hartley ensured that the work had been completed to date and provided the data to the WWG chair.

4. 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.

b) EU Exit Changes to Habitat Regulations

The Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Welsh Ministers have made changes to parts of the Conservation of Habitat and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) so that they operate effectively. Most of these changes involved transferring functions from the European Commission to the appropriate authorities in England and Wales. All other processes or terms in the 2017 Regulations remain unchanged and existing guidance is still relevant. The obligations of a competent authority in the 2017 Regulations for the protection of sites or species do not change. More information is provided in the link below:

c) SPA Management

Defra are currently looking at the management of SPAs after finishing the recent designation of SPAs in England. Defra are gathering information on the current situation and identifying any potential gaps in management and establishing next steps. Officers have provided information and highlighted the current situation with the recently designated Solway Firth SPA (information below).

d) Designation of the Solway Firth SPA

The Solway Firth SPA was designated on 3rd December 2020. The SPA includes the previously classified Upper Solway Flats and Marshes SPA and a large area of the Outer Solway from Whithorn in Scotland to just north of Whitehaven. As well as including all of the originally designated birds it also includes, Red Throated Diver and Ringed Plover as qualifying features and Common Scoter, Goosander, Cormorant, Lapwing, Herring Gull, Common Gull and Black Headed Gull as qualifying features as part of the waterbird assemblage. There are a number of outstanding HRAs to be completed for the Solway Firth SPA which were on hold after concerns were raised by officers on the approach to proposed management in the consultation documents. Officers have had a meeting with Natural England and will be progressing the outstanding HRAs over the coming months with netting being a priority.

5. FUTURE INSHORE STRATEGIC HAND GATHERING IMPLEMENTATION GROUP (FISHGIG)

An IFCA based group has been set up with a representative from each IFCA to discuss the management of both recreational and commercial hand gathered fisheries. FISHGIG provides a strategic working group to focus upon shared solutions to future management, through both non regulatory and regulatory means and allows for the sharing of resources and ideas. Mr Haines is the NWIFCA representative.

6. NEPHROPS CREEL STUDY – CUMBRIA WILDLIFE TRUST

Science Officers and Cumbria Wildlife Trust Officers met to discuss the Nephrops Creel Study Project and the work that would be carried out in 2021. Discussions focused around the timescale of the project, ownership of the pots and trial locations. The project will focus in the WoW MCZ where bottom towed gear is prohibited. The project will investigate the feasibility of using creels at a more commercial scale to catch Nephrops and builds on previous work carried out.

7. MERSEY TIDAL POWER PROJECT

Ms Knott attended a second online environmental workshop 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, the workshop was designed to:

- Seek environmental stakeholder input into proposed environmental data and evidence strategy including MTP commissioned studies and surveys.
- To identify any requirement for more detailed environmental topic engagement / discussion.

The workshop was 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.

Ms Knott ensured that all data that NWIFCA held that is relevant to the development has been provided to the project, such as fisheries data both commercial and recreational and any stock data we hold for cockle and mussel beds within the area.

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

8. MORECAMBE BAY MUSSEL MANAGEMENT PLAN

Science officers met with Laurence Browning from Natural England in October to discuss previous work on the Morecambe Bay Mussel Management Plan which was halted in 2016 due to unresolved issues around bird food requirement and spawning stock biomass. Discussions on bird food requirement centered around the current cockle and mussel HRAs, how cockle and mussel stock data is presented. Work carried out by Calum Booth from RSPB on what individual birds need for feeding throughout winter, and if this information could be cross referenced against landings data. Since the meeting Mr Browning has investigated work nationally on bird food requirements, to see if there is a consistent approach to assessing requirements in shellfisheries. There are a range of methods used around the UK and it is recommended that we look to update the work done by Mr Booth. Officers plan to make progress this year but a full plan is unlikely to be in place for this year's mussel fisheries. This is due to the volume of work required to update the plan, the consultation with industry, the HRA assessment of the plan, and the reduced capacity of the science team.

9. SURVEY SCHEDULE AND PROGRESS 2021

A Leasowe Clam inspection took place on 21st October 2021 to validate the surveys which took place in the summer and autumn. This inspection was to validate the survey work which had been carried out in the summer and was presented in the report, Investigating the Presence and Abundance of Non-cockle Bivalves in the North Wirral Foreshore July-October 2020 at the last TSB meeting. The reduced surveying is typical at this time of year due to the loss of daylight hours and time of day the spring tides occur.

Annex A provides what surveys officers deem as essential for 2021 and highlights the times of year these surveys will be completed. An updated plan will be provided at each TSB meeting. As the survey schedule is reactive to developing needs of the Authority. Surveys for Chinese Mitten Crabs may not be needed after the 2020 records of the species in Morecambe Bay. Officers will contact regulators to investigate if there is still value in providing reports as previously done.

Potential additional cockle surveys:

- Foulnaze – should stock be present there would be a requirement to survey the area. Wait for industry reports.
- Any other area of dense cockle not previously known about within the district.

Potential additional mussel surveys

- Perch and Black Scar – Regular inspections if a fishery is likely to take place, this will be assessed after the initial inspection.
- South America and Falklands – Regular inspections if mussel has persisted from 2020, if areas of hard ground have opened up and to monitor any new settlement. This will be assessed after the initial inspection in March.

10. OTHER MEETINGS ATTENDED

- Mersey Sediment Group
- Blue Carbon Working Group
- IFCA and MMO Licensing Engagement

Jon Haines
Acting Senior Scientist
29th January 2021

Annex A – SURVEY SCHEDULE AND PROGRESS TABLES 2021

Cockle	Type	Number of days	Number of officers	2021 Timing	Planned	Complete	Return needed?
<u>Morecambe Bay</u>							
Pilling	Survey	1	4	July			
Middleton	Survey	1	4	July			
Warton	Survey	1	4	July			
Flookburgh	Survey	2	4	July			
Leven	Survey	1	4	July			
Aldingham	Survey	1	2	July			
Newbiggin	Survey	1	2	July			
Duddon	Inspection	1	2	Before July			
<u>Ribble</u>							
Lytham (3 beds)	Inspection	1	2	Before July			
Southport (4 beds)	Inspection	1	2	Before July			
<u>Wirral</u>							
Leasowe	Survey	1	4	July			
<u>Solway</u>							
Middle Bank	Survey - Boat	1-2	Boat Crew +4	May-July			

Mussel	Type	Number of days	Number of officers	2021 Timing	Planned	Complete	Return needed?
<u>Morecambe Bay</u>							
Fleetwood (4 beds)	Inspection	1	2	May			
Wyre End	Inspection	1	2	May			
Heysham Flat	Inspection	8	2	Monthly Feb-Sep			
Foulney	Dutch Wand	1	4	May-Jun			
Walney Channel	Dutch Wand	1	4	May-Jun			
Low Bottom	Inspection	1	2	May-Jun			
S. America / Falklands	Inspection	1	2	Mar			
Duddon	Inspection	1	2	May-Jun			
<u>Dee</u>							
West Kirby	Inspection	1	2	May-Jun			
Southport (4 beds)	Inspection	1	2	May-Jun			
<u>Solway</u>							
Silloth	Side Scan Sonar	8	Boat Crew +2	Quarterly			

Otter Clams	Type	Number of days	Number of officers	2021 Timing	Planned	Complete	Return needed?
<u>Wirral</u>							
Leasowe	Survey	8	4	Quarterly			

Chinese Mitten Crab	Type	Number of days	Number of officers	2021 Timing	Planned	Complete	Return needed?
<u>Morecambe Bay</u>							
Heysham	Survey	4	2	Quarterly			
Foulney	Survey	4	3	Quarterly			
Walney Channel	Survey	4	2	Quarterly			