

NWIFCA Quarterly Meeting

21st March 2014: 11.00 a.m.

AGENDA
ITEM NO.

11

SCIENCE REPORT

22ND NOVEMBER 2013 – 21ST FEBRUARY 2014

GENERAL

Weather conditions and the lack of daylight at the times of good tides mean that surveys are limited in this quarter, which has been mainly dominated by further work on Byelaw 6: Protection of European Marine Site features, Morecambe Bay Fishery Order and Project Inshore work. A new lock-up has been found to accommodate science and enforcement equipment resulting in preparatory work on the forthcoming move.

SURVEY AND FISHERIES WORK

Foulnaze Cockle Beds

IFCO and industry reports suggest that little stock is remaining on the bed. If there are indications of further interest from the industry a survey will be carried out in the spring.

Wirral Cockle Beds

Science Officers and IFCOs are planning to survey Burbo Bank using the new Mersey based RIB as soon as tides and daylight, and IFCO familiarisation with the RIB allow. Officers have been unable to access this area before now due to lack of boats. It will prove an interesting day with observations on bird utilisation of the area also planned.

Officers are also intending to survey Leasowe cockle bed as soon as conditions allow to gain data on current cockle stock levels, and also to gather data on the other bivalve species being collected by hand-gatherers. It is understood that Professor Chris Frid has a Masters student conducting a project on the latter and it is hoped to combine results.

Ribble and Morecambe Bay Cockle Beds

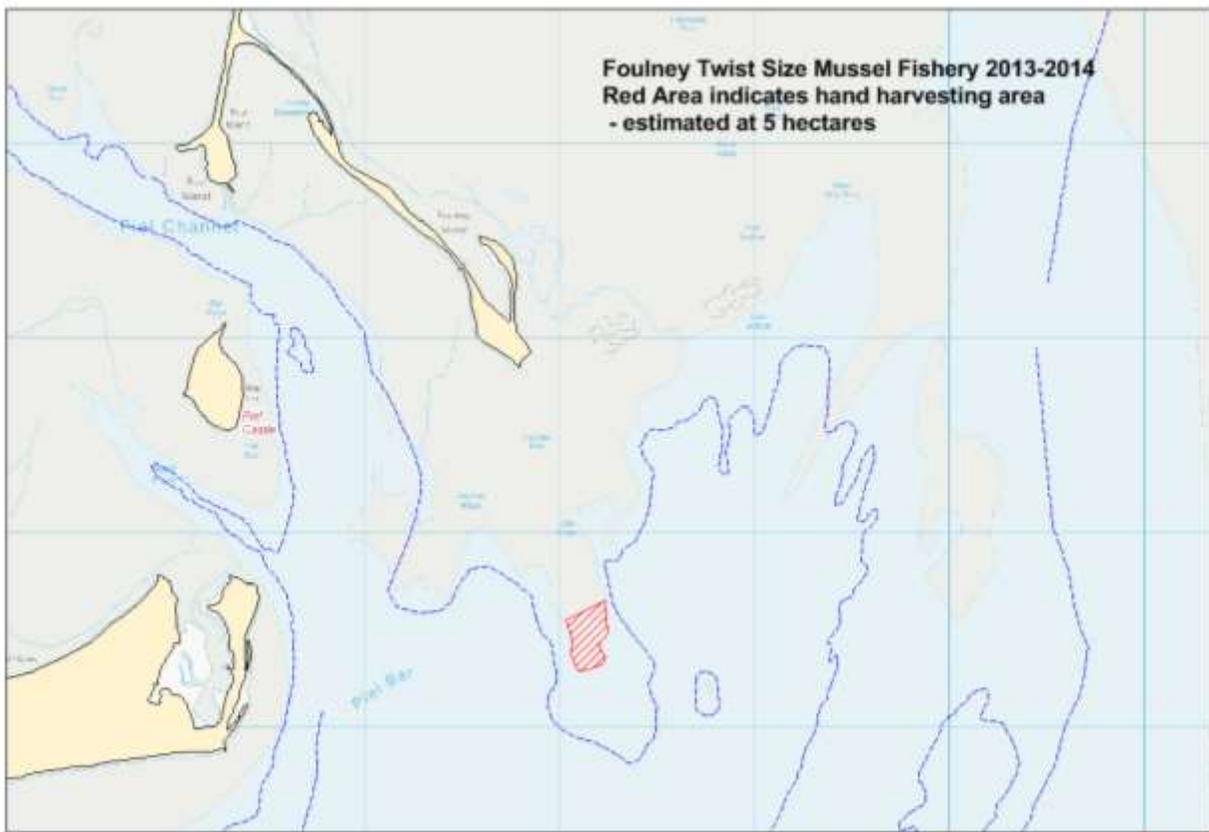
Currently all cockle beds in the District are closed due to low stock densities. IFCOs report to the Science Team on their observations of the beds when carrying out sample runs. Stock surveys of 2014 spat settlement will be targeted if they report any substantial recruitment.

Morecambe Bay Mussel Beds

Foulney Mussels

The Senior Scientist, Enforcement Director and local IFCO inspected Foulney mussels on the first available daylight tide of the year. Reports from the industry that the severe high winds and storms had washed out a substantial amount from the bed were corroborated. Officers inspected the bed as the tide receded – the central area had been basically scoured out down to stone. There were clumps of mud left showing how thick the mud had previously been. Along the 'ridge' to the east of the bed there was some loose size mussel – and a little amount of barnacled mussel – which suggests this had been washed over from the centre of the bed, where it has been recorded in past surveys. There

has been a low level of hand-gathering activity of this size mussel, with fishers using graders to sift out size mussel from undersize and shell.



Duddon Mussels

The local IFCO has begun collecting samples for shellfish hygiene classification from a bed in the Duddon estuary that appears to still be holding good mussel, not quite size. The Senior Scientist, Enforcement Director and IFCOs met with National Trust officers to discuss and agree a plan for ensuring access to this fishery once open would not impact on the protected species and habitats of the Sandscale Nature Reserve. A survey is planned for the good tides at the end of February, and a further verbal report will be delivered to Members at the meeting.

Other Mussel Beds in the District

Fleetwood Mussel Beds

The Science Team collate reports from the local IFCO on the state of these beds. The condition of the shellfish beds is not good. Black Scar mussel bed is for the most part down to the gravel, with possibly a few small mussel hard into the stone. Perch Scar is down to the clay bed and on King Scar the whole area has been covered by a fresh layer of stone. Rossall Scar has clearly been similarly washed about.

Clearly the storms have emphasised the dynamic nature of the surface sediments in this area. There has been considerable sand loss along the North Fylde coastal strip. There does seem to be some redeposit of sand over the central part of the North Wharf but not sufficient to cover the amount taken from the shore. Sand loss is also apparent along the northern and western intertidal beaches of the North Wharf with several historical wrecks showing that officers have not seen for a few years.

West Kirby Mussels

A survey of the West Kirby mussel bed was carried out on 23rd January 2014. The Senior Scientist and a Science Officer were present, along with three IFCOs. The objective was to map the extent of the bed and gain an estimate of percentage coverage (size mussel, undersize mussel, dead shell or scour) as part of the ongoing monitoring of the bed. On arrival at the bed it became quickly apparent that it had vastly changed since previous surveys. The majority of the bed consisted of mixed sizes of dead mussel and cockle shells, spread in patches across the bed with vast scoured areas. Due to the scarcity of live mussel officers were unable to map a distinct area of live mussel bed, but samples and photographs were taken. Of the live mussels within the samples, 17% were undersize and 83% size (>45mm).



Images of the West Kirby mussel bed overall and close up, showing the scarcity of live mussel, and the high proportion of dead mussel and cockle shells present. (23rd January 2014).

PROJECT WORK

EUROPEAN MARINE SITES – REVIEW OF FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

After the making of Byelaw 6: Protection of European Marine Site features at the 6th December Authority meeting Officers have worked with the MMO to produce a final draft of the Byelaw and supporting documents (e.g. the Regulatory Impact Assessment). Officers have also been involved in ensuring that the formal public consultation is advertised and responses are dealt with accordingly.

With the “red” phase of the process at its end Officers have begun work on the large task of producing assessments for all the amber and green gear/feature interactions. Work on this project began with a screening process which removed a large number of interactions as they do not occur. These interactions do not need a full assessment but only a basic “Test of Likely Significant Effect” (TLSE). Information for this screening was gathered by meeting with local IFCOs to discuss the fishing activity that occurs in the EMS in their area. Officers then met with Natural England site leads to discuss prioritisation of the remaining interactions (which will require a full TLSE or Appropriate Assessment). Priorities were assigned when there were gaps in feature position and extent data, a lack of knowledge of the exact level and location of fishing activity, where more information is required on impacts to make an assessment or when it is known that a detailed Appropriate Assessment will have to be completed. Reassuringly these priorities were similar across sites in the District and were similar to those which have been highlighted previously (e.g. impacts of shellfish gathering on birds).

The next step is to feed these priorities and the necessary work required to plug the gaps in data / knowledge into the 2014-15 Science Plan, and to begin collating evidence required to complete these assessments.

Officers have also been involved in the EMS work on a national level, feeding back NWIFCA progress and taking part in a range of teleconference calls including the EMS Working group and TAG EMS Working Group. A teleconference was also held with the MMO to discuss management of sites that cross the 6 nm limit.

MCZ DESIGNATION – TRANCHE ONE

Prioritisation of work in conjunction with MCZs was undertaken within the EMS prioritisation project (detailed above). As both MCZs in the NWIFCA District are low priority on a national level, these have also been assigned a low priority for NWIFCA work.

MORECAMBE BAY HYBRID FISHERY ORDER

Special meetings have been held with Members to discuss in depth the proposals within the MBFO Management Plan in order to produce a fully updated version to feed in to the process of producing a Statutory Instrument with Defra. Amendments to the Plan are being drafted, although there are a number of key issues that require further discussion and decision at TSB before a final version can be produced.

CUMBRIA WILDLIFE TRUST MARINE GRADUATES SCHEME

The initial three year project is drawing to a close but Officers are delighted at the prospect of continuing and strengthening the partnership arrangement for another three years following the announcement that Cumbria Wildlife Trust has secured funding through the Heritage Lottery Fund. Their project will provide 12 nine-month placements for graduate trainees and four 12 month placements for west coast trainees over the three years, and will cover the Cumbrian and Lancashire coastlines.

As Members are aware the Marine Graduates are trained by the Science team in cockle and mussel and intertidal *Sabellaria alveolata* surveys, along with issues around fisheries management and the work of the NWIFCA in balancing socio-economics and environmental interests. The main output will see a comprehensive report on the health and extent of the *Sabellaria alveolata* reef at Heysham Flat, currently in draft. This will be published on both the NWIFCA and CWT's websites and fulfils NWIFCA's action in the Morecambe Bay EMS Management Plan.

RAZOR CLAM FISHERY DEVELOPMENT

Disappointingly there has been no further progress with the Cefas Fisheries Science Partnership funded project due to limited Cefas staff availability and a lack of suitable weather. A derogation from NWIFCA byelaws has been issued allowing work to be carried out following receipt of an agreed Habitats Regulations Assessment, and Officers are in regular contact with Dr Dave Palmer (the project lead).

With the deadline for data collection (31st March) drawing nearer it is hoped that some testing of the gear and data collection will be able to take place before this date.

PROJECT INSHORE

The Science Team collated Carnforth and Whitehaven officers' views and together with the CEO have responded to the circulation of the draft Stage 3 Report 'Strategic Sustainability Review.' Although the provision of information on inshore fisheries collated into one report should be welcomed a number of concerns were raised in the response.

The fact that many of the fishery stocks cross jurisdictional boundaries and IFCA's face real difficulties in managing these without introducing measures that penalise the inshore fleet is stated in the report. However this is not stressed clearly enough. This should be highlighted as a key take-home message as to what needs remedying by Defra for inshore fisheries to be managed sustainably.

There were numerous errors within the draft, and Officers have felt throughout that the process has been rushed and IFCA's involvement has not been to the extent initially promised at the beginning of the project. There are concerns about the publication of the report amid potential high media interest, when implied and actual criticism of NWIFCA in many parts of the report is not justified by the evidence presented. These comments could lead to wider unwarranted and uninformed negative perceptions of the NWIFCA. This is a concern shared by other IFCA's. The report pre-supposes too much previous knowledge and experience with MCS methods. This makes some sections incomprehensible to IFCA members and most officers. The scoring systems, principles and how these are used to reach conclusions will not be understood by the main body of the readership towards which this report is directed. We await a response from the Project Inshore team on the next step.

AUTHORISATIONS AND CONSULTATIONS

Barrow Long Sea Outfall – MMO licence consultation
Mersey Gateway Bridge – MMO license consultation
Pipeline for the reclamation of Liverpool 2 – MMO consultation
Low Level Waste Repository (near Drigg) – EA licence extension consultation
Walney Extension wind farm – Planning Inspectorate consultation

MEETINGS, WORKSHOPS AND COURSES ATTENDED

Mussel Workshop – Developing Indicators for Good Environmental Status (GES) of *Mytilus edulis* beds under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD). Heriot-Watt University, external consultants and fisheries managers. Workshop discussed the use of mussel beds as Biogenic Reef Habitats as a proxy for biodiversity in assessing GES relevant to Descriptor 1 (Biological Diversity is maintained). Following representation from the Senior Scientist it was agreed that ephemeral seed mussel beds were not suitable for classification as a biogenic reef habitat and would not be included in the proposals.

Barrow Wildlife and Heritage Advisory Committee
Quarterly TSB Meeting
Special TSB Meetings to discuss MBFO
Bangor Mussels Producers Association members – to discuss proposals within the MBFO Plan
Enforcement Meetings
FLOWW Working Group – Dial-in
Foundation MapInfo Training – Sarah Temple
Intermediate MapInfo Training – Abigail Leadbeater
ATV Training – Sarah Temple
IFCO Course – Abigail Leadbeater & Sarah Temple
Natural England Drop Down Camera Training (lead by CMACS) – four Officers

Cefas Camera Workshop – two officers

Meeting with Chris Frid at Liverpool University to discuss video survey training opportunities

COMMUNICATIONS

The communication role began this quarter through taking part in a workshop held by the Association of IFCAs in London which focused on developing stakeholder engagement and partnership working with other IFCAs and members of the Defra working family. The meeting was extremely valuable towards seeing how different organisations have varying approaches towards this relatively new role within marine organisations.

This quarter has also seen the production of the first newsletter of the year which aimed to update readers on progress with marine conservation zones and the review of Fisheries within European Marine Sites as well as other interest news from the autumn/ winter period across the North West. The Newsletter will now be produced on a quarterly basis rather than tri-annually.

There has also been the development of the communications plan which looks at how the authority can aim to communicate effectively with stakeholders in the District.

A successful community participation event was also attended by IFCOS in Liverpool, hosted by Mersey Port Health Authority and was aimed at raising marine awareness in the area. Moving forward, community engagement events are being planned for the spring.

Science Officers

10th March 2014