

Ribble Cockle Fishery: Update

General Situation May 2011.

1. The unusual and extreme weather experienced throughout the spring of 2011 has caused unexpected mortalities to the Ribble cockle beds. There have been major losses of the <5mm size group on all beds so far observed and stocks are being reassessed. The latest position is set out below.
2. **N. Run, St Annes.** This bed has contracted a little but has not suffered the major losses observed elsewhere. There are moderate but definitely workable levels of half-grown cockles. Local fishermen are keeping the bed under close observation. Parts could be suitable for low level commercial harvesting during the later months of 2011.

Fylde Borough Council Officers are gathering MSH samples to re-classify the area.

3. **Granny's Bay.** There has been a significant loss off the <5mm cockle group on this bed. The area holds low levels of half-grown cockles and the occasional bigger specimen. There is some interest in this area however large scale commercial harvesting appears unlikely.

Fylde B.C. Officers are gathering MSH samples to re-classify the area.

4. **Georges Brow.** Condition of bed unknown/awaiting survey.
5. **Crossens Sluice.** This bed has suffered very high losses and is now considered incidental.
7. **S. Gut.** Condition unknown/awaiting survey.
8. **Penfold North.** There has been a very high mortality of the <5mm size group. The bed has contracted but now holds 200/250/m2 half-grown cockles. This bed will be of commercial interest by late 2011. There has been a lot of local and national scouting.

NWIFCA staff are undertaking MSH sample gathering work.

9. **Penfold South.** Again there have been losses on the more exposed parts of this bed but the lower parts of the bed are growing on well. This bed may be ready for exploitation by 1 September and will probably be the first bed where stocks reach harvest-able size.

NWIFCA staff are undertaking MSH sample gathering work.

10. **Penfold West.** This area has suffered very high losses and only low levels of half-grown cockles remain. Staff have started MSH sample gathering work. Serious commercial exploitation of this area is not expected this year.

Summary

11. The Penfold North and Penfold South beds are expected to be ready for commercial harvesting during the later months of this year. The fishery is gathering a disproportionate amount of interest from the industry.

12. Local environmental groups and other area users are rightly concerned about a possible repeat of the situation (with particular regard to the social disturbance) that occurred on the Wirral last year.
13. The Penfold channel beds are accessible from a considerable number of slipways however the beds are for the most part invisible to the casual observer from the shore. Disturbance of the public and other disruption is most likely to occur around beach access points.
16. There has been no significant cockle fishery on the Ribble for almost a decade, as a result only the small number of local men who joined the migratory cockle harvesting fraternity have Byelaw 5 permits. By far the majority of genuine local fishermen do not have Byelaw 5 permits but can demonstrate considerable track record for the dredge fisheries on the Ribble when the area was last worked as a commercial fishery. To say that this is already causing some discontent within the Ribble fishing community is something of an understatement.
17. Not all areas are suitable for the hand gathering of cockles from a boat. No registered fishing boats are based at Southport. The local fishery is well developed using specially adapted vehicles. Any cockles harvested from boats would have to be beach landed to vehicles, as a result the boat only option used on the Dee is not open to us. When the Georges Brow fishery was worked from boats gatherers were transported across the Ribble in local shrimp boats and the catch was then returned across the river in punts towed behind the shrimp boats.
18. The Penfold Channel beds have been harvested by wet dredging, dry dredging and experimentally with a boat dredge in the past. Local interests tend to favour the wet dredge to gather cockles. Professional cockle harvesters from the adjacent Dee and Morecambe Bay fisheries tend to oppose mechanical cockle harvesting. Migratory and low investment opportunist harvesters from outside of the present NWIFCA District are opposed to mechanical harvesting of cockles, it was this section of the industry that was the primary cause of the recent problems on the Wirral and previously in Morecambe Bay and on the Dee.
19. Local fishermen do have the knowledge to work the area at night; shrimping on adjacent areas using vehicles and hand nets on dark tides is routine during the autumn fishery. The gathering of cockles at night by skilled local men is again not unknown. However the use of gangs of unskilled individuals or gathering by those who are unfamiliar with the area at night must be considered hazardous.

**IFCO Ribble Area
June 2011**